Patterns of philanthropic gifts among student-athlete alumni: A case study of a Midwest university

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Patterns of philanthropic gifts among student-athlete alumni: A case study of a Midwest university

by

Timothy James Tesar

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Linda Hagedorn, Co-major Professor
Janice Friedel, Co-major Professor
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Arne Hallam

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2019

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Liz Tesar, because without her, none of this would have been possible.
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NOMENCLATURE

The following key terms were used in this study and defined here:

- **alumni**: those individuals who completed coursework and may or may not have graduated from Theodore University;
- **alumni participation rate**: the percentage of those alumni that give a monetary donation to the university, in a given fiscal year;
- **gift**: a charitable donation that has been made;
- **giving**: the act of making a philanthropic donation;
- **giving rate**: the percentage of alumni donating to their alma mater;
- **set**: social exchange theory;
- **student-athlete**: an individual who competed, for any length of time, on a varsity sport at Theodore University; the following varsity sports are currently offered, or have been offered at Theodore in the past:
  - basketball—men and women,
  - track and field—men and women,
  - baseball (no longer offered),
  - wrestling (no longer offered),
  - cross-country running—men and women,
  - football—men,
  - volleyball—women,
- golf—men and women,
- tennis—men and women,
- soccer—men and women,
- rowing—women,
- softball—women; and

walk-on a student who played a sport but did not initially have a scholarship to play.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The five-year duration of this doctoral program and concluding dissertation has been a journey of immense professional and personal growth for me. When starting this program, I was working in international admissions, researching international student enrollment trends related to tuition increases for international students. I then had an opportunity to oversee first-year student admissions at a small liberal arts college where my research interests switched to the use of standardized admission test scores for predicting college academic performance. Finally, I most recently embraced a new professional opportunity to be a higher education fundraiser, where my research took me to this dissertation on the reasons alumni choose to be philanthropic or not with their alma mater. Personally, over the course of this doctoral program, my wife and I welcomed two children, who are now four and nine months, and the absolute joy of our lives. In addition to job changes, over the course of this doctoral journey, we also struggled through the loss of a family member and moved to a new community. The one constant through this journey has been my wife, Liz Tesar, who has always been my number one advocate and supporter on my quest to advance my education, research, and career.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to describe the experiences of Theodore University (a pseudonym for a Midwest university) student-athlete alumni in deciding whether to give philanthropically. The research questions were as follows: (1) Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore? (2) How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore? (3) What are their motivations to either give, or not give, to Theodore? A qualitative approach; using data collection methods of interviews, archival records, and written documentation; was used to gauge the propensity and intrinsic desires of these alumni to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore.

Using a constructionist epistemology, and social exchange theory, the data analysis process consisted of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of philanthropy was highlighted and identified by values coding. The narrowing process of the data into codes, re-coding, and then categories led to the core themes and theories to answer the research questions.

I divided the findings for this study into categories to answer each of the research questions individually and then further divided the findings into subcategories based on themes in the data analysis. Discussion and implication of these findings for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers conclude this study.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Fundraising for postsecondary institutions has gained greater prominence and significance over the past 20 years from higher education administrators and media covering higher education topics for the general public. Most postsecondary institutions in the United States are not-for-profit and have a 501©3 status that allows for charitable giving from individuals and corporations. Furthermore, many higher-education institutions look to fundraising to add to existing revenue sources such as tuition revenue or auxiliary income. When looking to raise funds for the university, administrators often solicit their alumni, foundations, and corporations in their search for donations. To help support the myriad of needs, most universities have including scholarship support, capital projects, research funding, and general operating costs.

In the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2017, colleges and universities raised $43.6 billion, according to the latest version of the annual Voluntary Support of Education survey from the Council for Aid to Education (Kaplan, 2018), of which $11.3 billion (26%) was from alumni (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Voluntary support of higher education by source, 2017.


This represents a 2% increase in the amount of money raised from alumni from the 2016 data (see Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated Voluntary Support of Higher Education by Source and Purpose, 2016 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount Raised 2016</th>
<th>Percentage of Total 2016</th>
<th>Amount Raised 2017</th>
<th>Percentage of Total 2017</th>
<th>Current $ Difference</th>
<th>Adj. for Inflation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>$9,930</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>$11,370</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-alumni individuals</td>
<td>7,520</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>7,860</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporations</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>6,600</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>−2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>12,450</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>13,130</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other organizations</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>4,640</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total voluntary support</td>
<td>$41,000</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>$43,600</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Amount Raised 2016</th>
<th>Percentage of Total 2016</th>
<th>Amount Raised 2017</th>
<th>Percentage of Total 2017</th>
<th>Current $ Difference</th>
<th>Adj. for Inflation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current operations</td>
<td>25,150</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>25,800</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital purposes</td>
<td>15,850</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>17,800</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Seltzer (2018), even with an expansion of philanthropic dollars, colleges’ and universities’ reliance on philanthropic support is not enough to fund the bulk of their budgets. Philanthropic support has hovered around 10% of total college and university revenues in recent years. As illustrated in Figure 2, this percentage is down from 2000, when charitable support represented a peak of 15.7% of institutions’ expenditures (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Total support as a percentage of expenditures among survey respondents, 1969-2016.  

Well over half of all contributions to higher education (59.2%) were directed toward current operations, including facility maintenance, salaries, student support, and other day-to-day expenditures. The remaining 40.8% went to capital purposes. The previous year, 61.3% of contributions went to operations, and 38.7% went for capital purposes (Seltzer, 2018). As the information from the Voluntary Support of Education survey suggest, the funds raised for colleges and universities represent a large percentage of university operations, as well as for capital improvement projects on university campuses. With philanthropy being such a vital part of the budgeting and capital improvement process for higher education institutions, most
colleges and universities in the United States now have a dedicated team of fundraising professionals to help advance the mission of their institution through corporate, foundation, and alumni philanthropic support.

Universities, as with all nonprofit entities, assume that asking for philanthropic support does not always translate into dollars being realized. Individuals, corporations, and foundations all have limited resources and cannot support every initiative. Like any competitive landscape, there are tools and strategies to increase the likelihood of those most interested and invested in the institution’s mission to help support and donate to it. Colleges and universities utilize third parties such as, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), and the Education Advisory Board, the Advisory Board Company, to fine-tune their strategies to solicit, cultivate, and negotiate all available philanthropy dollars, including those that may come from university alumni. Related to university alumni, many colleges and universities have a myriad of different giving requests to alumni each fiscal year, including annual fund gifts, bequest gifts, and major gifts. Typically, this alumni giving strategy can be refined even further to segment and focus on specific alumni populations, such as young alumni, older alumni, or alumni who graduated with specific majors.

The advancement office at Theodore University (a pseudonym for a Midwest university) is charged with many of the external-facing tasks of the institution including alumni relations, communication, public relations, and development or fundraising. Related to fundraising, the department is responsible for raising annual fund gifts in excess of $3.5 million each fiscal year, along with cultivating and soliciting major gifts that fund scholarships, programs, and capital projects among other things. Annual fund gifts represent approximately 3% of the total operating budget for the university. Additionally, the university spends the interest earned on its
endowment each year on its operating budget, and for special initiatives, which is about 5% on average, or approximately $10 million each fiscal year.

Asking alumni of the institution to give back to their alma mater is one of the critical functions of the advancement office. Theodore University has an alumni participation rate of approximately 12%, meaning that about 12% of its alumni choose to give back monetarily to Theodore University each fiscal year. This percentage is a median giving rate when compared to other higher-education institutions across the country (Kaplan, 2018). In comparison, Princeton University has an average giving rate of 60%. Between 2014 to 2016, the 10 higher education institutions in the United States with the highest percentage of undergraduate alumni donors all had giving rates of 50% or higher (Ross, 2018).

While Theodore University has desired to increase the percentage of alumni that give back to their alma mater for some time now, a specific population of interest are those alumni who were student-athletes at Theodore University. According to the vice-president of university advancement (personal communication, 2018), Theodore University alumni who were student-athletes have historically given back less monetary support and fewer philanthropic gifts compared to their alumni peers who were not student-athletes. Thus, the problem statement that this study analyzed was how student-athlete alumni view their philanthropic decisions toward and with Theodore University.

**Focus of Study**

The purpose of this case study was to describe how alumni experience their giving to Theodore University and to understand their giving decisions, specifically for those alumni who were student-athletes during their time at Theodore University. A case study approach, using interview methods, was used to gauge the phenomenon of alumni philanthropy, along with the propensity and intrinsic desires of these alumni to choose to either give, or not give, monetary
support to Theodore University. I asked two broad questions to guide this study: “What have the individuals experienced in terms of the phenomenon of giving back to their alma mater?” and “What context or situations have typically influenced or affected their experiences of the phenomenon of giving back to their alma mater?”

**Research Questions**

The research questions the researcher answered were as follows: (1) Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore? (2) How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore? (3) What are their motivations to either give, or not give, to Theodore? This study was created following a pilot study conducted in 2018 that researched Theodore University alumni who had full-tuition academic scholarships as students and analyzed their philanthropic tendencies as alumni (Tesar, 2018).

The significance of this study was in providing context to Theodore University and other university leaders about why alumni who were student-athletes choose to either give or not give back monetary donations to their alma mater. Additionally, many of the findings in this study can be applied to the fundraising work of other colleges and universities. Practically, this study can be used immediately by administrators in the university advancement office at Theodore University who are looking for ways to garner more philanthropic gifts from alumni, as well as by advancement and alumni officials at other universities. This study also filled a gap in the qualitative scholarly research that has been published on university alumni philanthropy.

**Methodology**

To examine the research questions, a qualitative, case study approach was used to identify, in depth, some of the reasons that alumni chose to either be, or not be, philanthropic with Theodore University. This qualitative case study approach was grounded in a constructivist
epistemology and aligned with social exchange theory (SET), both of which are discussed in later chapters.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. The transferability of this study was one limitation. This study focused on student-athlete alumni and has applicable findings for researchers studying this population. Because the sample population focused on student-athlete alumni, this study may not be transferable to other higher-education populations concerning their philanthropic inclinations. Also, since this case was bound by a specific population of student-athlete alumni, there were limits to the implications for the general audience of those looking at overall alumni giving to universities. The reason for delimiting this study was that most of the scholarly research that exists on university philanthropy has been focused on the broad, overall alumni giving patterns, and usually presented in a quantitative, aggregate format. This research supplements prior research with a targeted, in-depth, qualitative examination of the psychology of university alumni philanthropy. The reason that this study focused on Theodore University was that it is a private university where there has been little research conducted in the past, and the administrators at Theodore gave approval for this study. Given the parameters of this study, this research area may be expanded further to include other universities, and other subsets of the alumni and donor bases to continue to identify trends, patterns, and themes for university alumni giving and philanthropy.

Descriptive Information on Philanthropy at Theodore University

Theodore University is a mid-sized, private, Midwestern university with an approximate enrollment of 5,000 students as of June 2019. Theodore’s varsity sports compete at the NCAA Division I level. Of its approximately 71,000 alumni, about 6,700 (9%) of those are student-athlete alumni (Theodore University Alumni and Advancement Office, 2018). As mentioned
before, overall, the university averages a philanthropic giving rate of about 12% annually.

Within the student-athlete alumni subpopulation, that percentage is approximately 10%
(Theodore University Alumni and Advancement Office, 2018). For added context to the study, here are some brief descriptive statistics about alumni giving from Theodore University alumni and advancement records (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2. Theodore University Alumni, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theodore University Alumni (overall)</th>
<th>Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate number of total living alumni</td>
<td>71,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of alumni that gave in 2016</td>
<td>6,585*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of alumni that gave in 2016</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overall alumni giving in 2016</td>
<td>$24,605,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average overall alumni gift in 2016</td>
<td>$3,736*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3. Theodore University Student-Athlete Alumni, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theodore University Student-Athlete Alumni</th>
<th>Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate number of student-athlete alumni</td>
<td>6,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni living in the state</td>
<td>1,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni living outside of the state</td>
<td>4,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (mean) lifetime giving of student-athlete alumni</td>
<td>$2,835*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni who have never given a gift</td>
<td>3,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (mean) gift of student-athlete alumni in 2016</td>
<td>$224*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni who did not give a gift in 2016</td>
<td>6,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni who gave between $1-$100 in 2016</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student-athlete alumni who gave $101 or more in 2016</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of student-athlete alumni who gave a gift in 2016</td>
<td>672*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of student-athlete alumni who gave a gift in 2016 | 10%


This study began with a literature review of the relevant scholarly research published about university philanthropy followed by the qualitative methodological approaches used to guide the study. An overview of the research participants, findings from the data, and implications for different stakeholders complete the study.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alumni giving to their alma mater can be traced back to Brown University in 1823, which established an alumni fund to raise $1,000 to be used for the purchase of medals to be awarded to the winners of contests. In 1890, Yale University organized an annual giving campaign from its alumni for any use deemed fit by the university (CASE, 2018). This modest start in alumni fundraising has now evolved into universities and colleges in the United States raising over $43 billion in 2017, with personal giving from alumni representing 14.5% of that, or $11.37 billion (Seltzer, 2018).

Scope of Literature Review

The focus of the literature review was on philanthropic giving and alumni relations at universities in the United States. Using a variety of search methods, several published studies were reviewed and critiqued on their research around philanthropy and alumni giving, along with studies related to more generic patterns of philanthropic behavior for comparison. While researching other scholarly articles, an emphasis was placed on those that had completed research on the reasons subjects choose to either give or not give monetary donations to a college, university, or other nonprofit entity. If articles only referenced other types of alumni relations or volunteerism, such as supporting events or helping with university or community initiatives, they were excluded from the literature review, as the focus of this study was reasons philanthropy, including monetary support, is engaged in and is important to individuals. Last, an emphasis was placed on analyzing recent articles, defined as those that had been published about this topic in the past 20 years. The reason for this is that universities and colleges, along with their avenues for philanthropic giving, have changed dramatically over the past two decades; for example, with an increase in online courses and a changing demographic of who attends college.
in the United States; and a more systematic approach to fundraising, including the use of the Internet and social media to raise funds. Therefore, it was reasoned that articles examining philanthropy and alumni relations prior to 20 years ago may be outdated. A complete summary of articles and documents cited in this study is found in the included reference list.

**Descriptive Summary of Literature**

The motivation for this study came from a gap in the recent scholarly literature about the psychology and altruism of philanthropic support of alumni to their alma mater. While there have been many scholarly articles written about philanthropic support of colleges and universities over the past 20 years, very few were focused on a particular subset of alumni, such as former student-athletes. Also, many of the articles that have been published on this topic have been researched using quantitative methods, and very little qualitative research has been completed, even though further qualitative research has been encouraged by several authors in the limitations and implications sections of their research on this topic. Also, this case study was a continuation of a study conducted by the principal investigator at Theodore University who completed an unpublished study on alumni at Theodore who had received a full-tuition academic scholarship as undergraduate students, and their reasons to either be, or not be, philanthropic with Theodore as alumni.

I have structured the literature review into three segments, starting with a broad overview of alumni and donor giving and philanthropy to universities, to segmented populations and their philanthropic giving, and finally to research concerning student-athlete alumni giving. I have summarized each segment of the literature review, with a broader summary, leading to my research questions at the end of the chapter.
Research on University Alumni Philanthropy

Baade and Sundberg (1996) have produced several published studies on alumni generosity since 1996 and have been cited many times by other authors since then, including Weerts and Ronca (2008), and Holmes (2009) that will be discussed later. Starting with their study on alumni generosity (Baade & Sundberg, 1996), which was a quantitative study analyzing alumni giving and admissions data from dozens of colleges and universities, the authors created a log, inputting data from the colleges’ admissions records and then the likelihood of giving related to those variables. Baade and Sundberg (1996) found that higher student wealth, better institutional quality (as measured by student ability, admissions selectivity, and instructional expenditures per student), and greater development efforts resulted in more significant gifts per alumni. The authors indicated that, at least at liberal arts colleges, better students were correlated with higher levels of alumni giving. Selectivity was also an important determinant of gifts to private institutions, a fact these institutions must also consider when considering changes in the admissions policy. The quality of the experience, as measured by the quality of the student body and instructional spending per student, correlated positively with alumni generosity, and the experiences students had influenced their attitudes toward the institution as alumni. In addition, Baade and Sundberg (1996) stated, “donations from current alumni are influenced at least in part by the current circumstances of the school” (p. 80). A critique of this study was that the authors did not collect data from any individual alumni, as the study was produced and analyzed in the aggregate. Furthermore, a conceptual or theoretical framework was not defined by the authors concerning what bounded or defined their research.

A similar study was conducted by Terry and Macy (2007), which was a quantitative cross-sectional research study using data from *US News and World Report*. This study analyzed data from 196 colleges and universities and what factors of these institutions were perceived
determinates of alumni giving rates. After running a regression analysis, the authors presented several results, including:

Rising student debt levels appear to have a negative impact on alumni giving. Rising student debt might also diminish the sense of obligation to support an educational institution after graduation. Selectivity and reputation have a significant impact on alumni giving rates as large institutional endowments, low acceptance rates, and being a private institution are significant determinants of alumni giving. (p. 14)

The authors of this study concluded that the “future challenge for the universities is to find ways to match alumni with initiatives and provide the impetus for giving to fund those initiatives” (Terry & Macy, 2007, p. 15). A critique of this article was that, like Baade and Sundberg’s (1996) research, this study was conducted in the aggregate. The authors attempted to draw conclusions from data points of 196 institutions that are not directly related to alumni giving patterns at a unique, institutional level. Furthermore, no conceptual framework or further qualitative analysis of the results was applied to the study.

Picking up on Baade and Sundberg (1996), and Terry and Macy’s (2007) research, Jessica Holmes’ (2009) quantitative study on alumni giving at selective liberal arts colleges analyzed multiple alumni relations data points from Middlebury College in Vermont to determine what attributes of individual alumni ($N = 22,641$), and of the college itself, resulted in increased alumni giving, and the factors that influenced an alum’s propensity to donate. Holmes’ study also examined if there was a link between charitable tax deductions and giving, the relationship between the prestige of the institution and charitable giving, and demographic variables in giving.
When analyzing the data and the determinates of alumni generosity, the log of total gift amounts was used as the dependent variable. The author’s first empirical analysis focused on the association between state allowances for charitable deductions and giving behavior. The second analysis examined the relationship between institutional prestige and alumni giving, where two annual measures of college prestige were factored in, the men’s hockey annual win-loss record to reflect athletic prestige and the *US News and World Report* annual college ranking to proxy the academic reputation of the institution.

Holmes’ (2009) results from alumni at Middlebury suggested that development officers from similar institutions should focus their efforts on female, married graduates, living in wealthy neighborhoods, preferably close to the institution. Another implication of the study was that extra resources should be devoted to soliciting donations from alumni with alumni relatives, those who were active during their undergraduate years, and those who have attended at least one reunion. The author also stated:

universities may also expect alumni contributions to increase in years when the college has achieved greater athletic prestige but lower academic prestige. Alumni (particularly recent graduates) appear to increase their giving as they experience “warm glow” from athletic successes but also to preserve the academic reputation of the institution that granted them their diploma. (p. 27)

A critique and limitation of this study is that the data were only from one liberal arts college, and like Baade and Sundberg’s (1996) research, only analyzed existing data points and did not directly ask or engage alumni about their giving patterns with qualitative methods. Also, a conceptual or theoretical framework for this study was not defined.
A similar quantitative study was conducted by Marr, Mullin, and Siegfried (2005), in which the researchers analyzed the financial aid data of former students from Vanderbilt University (N = 2,822) and then compared their financial aid as students to their philanthropic giving as alumni.

When reporting the results and implications of the study, the authors suggested that discrete changes in financial aid packages affect the willingness of alumni to contribute. Specifically, if a student had loans to pay for college, he or she was less likely to give, but if the student received a grant, he or she was more likely to give. The authors concluded, “for the mean aggregate contribution of $293, adding a small grant, say $1000, to an otherwise loan-only financial aid package could be expected to return about $35 in contributions over the first eight years” (Marr et al., 2005, p. 141).

Also, the authors stated that students’ undergraduate experiences affected their willingness to contribute as alumni, “Decisions regarding Greek organizations, athletics, and grading policies all bear, to one degree or another, on the likelihood students will continue to support their college or university after they graduate” (Marr et al., 2005, p. 141). A critique of this article was the lack of a qualitative follow up to understand further if financial aid was viewed as a factor in their giving by the alumni. Also, there was no conceptual or theoretical framework discussed in this study.

Building upon research related to just analyzing existing alumni data, Quigley, Bingham, and Murray’s (2002) quantitative study focused on alumni loyalty and their giving behavior to an institution. The specific objectives of this study were to “evaluate salient factors believed to influence alumni giving” (p. 75). What differentiated this study from others were the methods used. The methods used for this study included a field experiment involving participants in an
annual alumni fund drive at a four-year private college located in the northeastern United States. A total of 732 subjects from this institution were selected from the original alumni drive to receive one of several different and measured alumni acknowledgement programs. Several results from the study were indicated, including:

- Increasing the frequency of contact with existing donors did have a significant effect on their participation in the next donation drive.
- The more frequent contact may decrease the motivation of alumni to contribute.
- Older alumni are more loyal to the institution than are younger alumni. They tend to give in a more consistent pattern than do younger alumni.
- Alumni who have a more consistent history of giving maintain the pattern of giving, more so than alumni with a less consistent history of giving.

The authors recommended using a personalized message, signed by a senior faculty member, explaining how the alumni’s donation would be used had a positive impact on increasing subsequent donations. Also, the authors suggested that attempts by an institution to influence the giving behavior of their donors by developing, adjusting, or manipulating solicitation or acknowledgement programs are possible. The authors stated, “what is clear is that the use of one program for all donors is inappropriate if the desire is to cultivate and maintain a long-term relationship” (Quigley et al., 2002, p. 84). A limitation and critique of the article is that the research focused on one institution, and just one component of that institution’s efforts to develop and maintain long-term relationships with its alumni. Also, this study was conducted as a “snapshot in time” of one controlled effort to increase giving. This study did not consider more longer-term strategies of alumni giving patterns. Furthermore, this study did not use qualitative
methods to ask alumni about their giving, nor did it identify a conceptual or theoretical framework behind the study.

Weerts and Ronca (2008) expanded upon earlier research on alumni giving by tying theory into their research. Weerts and Ronca conducted a quantitative study with alumni volunteers analyzing 1,076 survey respondents from a large, research university using a binomial regression model. While this study did not focus specifically on monetary donations, it examined similar propensities concerning why alumni choose to volunteer or not at their alma mater.

The authors utilized social exchange theory (SET) as their conceptual framework which, “posits that alumni donor volunteerism is based on a feeling about whether a balance exists between what is put into the volunteer effort and what has been received from the university in the past or present” (Weerts & Ronca, 2008, p. 287). Findings and results from the study included:

The quality of an alumni’s undergraduate experience is an important variable predicting his or her volunteer support. Specifically, alumni donors who reported high levels of academic engagement while undergraduate students were 1.88 times more likely to volunteer at the university. Alumni donors who are most likely to volunteer are women who live in the state of their alma mater and are active in civic or religious organizations (p. 287).

Corresponding to social exchange theory, this study examined if there was a response for alumni to volunteer as a result of their attendance at a high-quality university. The authors found that, “these alums aim to give back to an institution or specific academic program that provided them a strong education and professional/life benefits” (Weerts & Ronca, 2008, p. 287).
In this study, the authors suggested that student experiences on campus played a role in predicting future alumni support. From a SET view in this study, the alumni’s perceptions about their experience at their university is compared to the efforts needed to give back their time to their alma mater, and that “providing a high-quality educational experience is critical to garnering future support from future alumni” (Weerts & Ronca, 2008, p. 289).

A critique and limitation of this study was that the data were from only one large, research university and that there was no qualitative analysis conducted to supplement what the larger dataset provided in the authors’ implications.

A follow-up study conducted by Weerts and Ronca (2009) examined the same large research institution quantitatively with a Likert-style survey, using a binomial regression analysis model to predict alumni donation giving for higher education at their alma mater. Subjects in the study were asked to identify the importance of several factors in their decisions to give donations related to their experience at their alma mater.

In reporting the results and implications, the authors stated, “the most important characteristic distinguishing between those alums who are likely to give versus those who will not relate to their beliefs about whether the university needs their gift money” (Weerts & Ronca, 2009, p. 114). The authors concluded that expectancy theory helps understand this finding, “alumni give based on the value or perceived outcome of the additional support, and the belief that a gift will help the university achieve a certain outcome” (p. 114).

Weerts and Ronca (2009) suggested a few other implications including why universities should articulate the need for alumni support in personal interactions, and why alumni may be philanthropic, for example:
The importance of athletics as a pivotal decision point should prompt further research about the connection between giving and athletics. In the long term, giving to one’s alma mater may be related to one’s religious upbringing and values…. an alum’s experience as an undergraduate student is of secondary importance in predicting the ultimate gift decision. Giving is somewhat linked to the alum’s involvement in college, with larger gifts coming from alumni who have strong feelings about the quality of academics and participated in academic organizations while a student. (p. 115)

A critique of this study is how the authors treated all alumni donors the same in their questions; the authors noted that there could be distinctions between those alumni who gave a considerable amount to the university and those who gave a small amount, but they were all considered donors for this study. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis was not conducted to investigate further the “why” of alumni giving.

In summary, the articles reviewed so far present an overview of quantitative research, presented in both an aggregate and individual case study format, on the reasons and motivations for alumni to give donations and be philanthropic with colleges and universities. The articles reviewed thus far are broad, examining all alumni from national datasets from liberal arts colleges and large research universities. While the methodologies have been different so far, including regression analysis from surveys and analysis of large datasets, there have been several themes in the findings, results, and implications in the research. Having alumni become more engaged and connected with the university, and alumni living closer to the institution have resulted in more philanthropy. Furthermore, there has been a theme of the more positive experiences the students have while attending college, including involvement with activities and financial aid packages, results in more alumni giving. Also, there has been a link identified
between knowing where a gift is going to an increased likelihood to donate; as well as demographic indicators that may increase giving, including being female, older, and being religious; all result in more giving. The alumni’s impression of the university, through athletic teams and national college rankings, for example, also impact giving. Last, in the articles reviewed thus far, the predominant conceptual theory used to analyze alumni giving has been SET.

**Unique Populations and Their Philanthropy**

SET was also used as the theoretical framework in Drezner’s (2009) study of philanthropic behaviors of African-American millennials at private, historically-Black colleges and universities. This was a qualitative case study using institutional documents, interviews with students and advisors, and observations. A primary and secondary source analysis included institutional documents. Drezner hypothesized that African Americans gave a larger percentage of their disposable income to nonprofits than any other racial group.

When discussing findings and implications, Drezner (2009) stated, “on one level, this sense of ‘giving back’ is consistent with other student alumni associations in which students report a feeling of reciprocity, giving back to the institution that helped them” (p. 161). In this study, Drezner concluded, “participants in [the] study certainly see the importance of and give generously of their time through volunteer service” (p. 162). Interview responses indicated another finding:

The importance of racial uplift as a motivating factor to act in a prosocial manner is evident. Student participants repeatedly mentioned that giving to scholarships to provide other African-American students with the opportunity to attend a Black college was a major reason they choose to be involved in the organization. Providing scholarships, in this case, is a means of racial uplift. (p. 161)
A critique of this article is that the subjects interviewed were all linked to the United Negro College Fund, and the historically-black colleges and universities, which may represent a bias in expanding the results to broader generalizations for all higher-education philanthropy.

Nesbit, Christensen, Tschirhart, Clerking, and Paarlberg (2015) explored decisions about where one gives—both organizational location and type. The authors proposed that where one gives directly relates to where they live, the connection to their local community, and “and the greatest portion of giving takes place within a donor’s own community and helps support activities in which the donor is directly involved” (Nesbit et al., 2015, p. 269).

The problems the researchers addressed included: (a) local residency duration affects local network ties and local sense of community that then affects the geographic dimension of where one gives—local versus non-local giving and (b) direct effects of residency duration on local and non-local giving. The primary research question was, “how well certain types of nonprofit organizations attract donations of individuals who vary in their length of residency” (p. 274).

With this in mind, the authors chose to focus on one geographic area, Wilmington, North Carolina.

The methods used included collecting data through a 2010 electronic survey that was distributed to listserv members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes. Survey questions focused on philanthropic and civic behaviors and attitudes, location of philanthropic behavior, types of organizations receiving respondents’ philanthropy, and residential history. The authors analyzed the results of 343 cases.

The results the authors reported found support for their model and hypothesis, including that the participants residencies are predictive to which nonprofit organizations may receive their donations, and
greater residency duration is linked to increased local network ties and sense of community. Also, as predicted, network ties and sense of community are positively linked to local giving. The longer one lived in the community, the more likely one was to give to local secular organizations and more specifically, to local arts and local human services nonprofits. (Nesbit et al., 2015, p. 282)

Several conclusions were given by the authors, including, non-local arts and education organizations had the most success in attracting former residents’ donations. Also, the study suggested that individuals give more donations the longer they live in their community. This study aligned with others in that the closer one lived to a nonprofit entity, such as a college or university, the more inclined he or she was to give. A critique of the study was that there was no conceptual framework provided, and the authors’ greatest limitation was that the data came from just one geographic location.

Mahony, Gladden, and Funk’s investigation (2003) was a quantitative study to develop a new scale for assessing motivational factors important to athletic donors, and the importance of these factors to understand why donors give to athletic departments. The researchers mailed a survey to 6,900 donors at three different universities and conducted three different regression analyses for each dependent variable. The goal of the analysis was to determine whether motivational factors were predictive of donor behavior.

When reporting the results of the study, the authors concluded that the motivational factors for giving were not predictive of donor behavior in this study. The primary reason that these donors chose to give was in part because of “athletic game seats and increasing the quality of the athletic program” (Mahony et al., 2003, p. 23). The authors concluded that each institution is unique in the reasons that donors choose to give to their athletic departments.
A similar study conducted by Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) examined involvement and its relationship to donor sex. The authors’ research questions explored the dichotomy of male and female donors. The authors sent an online survey to 7,647 current college athletic donors from three NCAA Division I FBS institutions located in the mountain and southwest regions of the United States. The authors stated that three institutions were chosen to collect a large enough sample of current female donors for data analysis.

According to the authors, the results suggested that significant differences existed for sex (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Specifically, affective involvement was stronger for female donors as opposed to male donors. Additionally, in comparison to their male counterparts, female donors made smaller annual contributions, had less donor longevity, and had lower annual income levels. There were no significant differences in the age of donors based on sex.

For implications, the authors suggested that being sensitive to the involvement needs of female donors may allow athletic fundraisers to leverage this potentially lucrative market segment better. The authors also stated that future research should also “focus on the influence of both cognitive and affective involvement on general donor behavior (i.e., decisions to contribute, gift amount, retention, and longevity)” (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011, p. 32).

Both articles examined a unique population of those individuals who gave to college athletic departments, both alumni of the institution and non-alumni (Mahony et al., 2003; Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). Both articles failed to provide enough implications from their studies that could be beneficial for fundraising practitioners, however.

A related study on collegiate athletic giving by Martinez, Stinson, Kang, and Jubenville (2010) was a document review analysis with a purpose to perform a meta-analytic review of the available scholarly research on the relationship between intercollegiate athletic success and
institutional giving. When reporting the results and implications, the authors found a link between intercollegiate athletic programs and institutional fundraising. The relationship between athletics and fundraising was determined by four variables, “the target of the giving, the alumni status of the donor, the institution’s level of NCAA competition, and the primary sport of interest” (p. 47). Based on this, the authors suggested that further research should be conducted that corresponds to this study, including:

- seek understanding of the underlying mechanisms causing these relationships, as well as extending itself to a consideration of other variables that may be important in the athletic performance-fundraising relationship. Further, research should be broadened to include other important variables subject to the influence of athletic programs, including institutional image, college choice, and/or matriculation. (p. 47)

Once again, this study was not focused on alumni or student-athletes in particular but confirmed the other two studies in that there was a potential link between fundraising and college athletic success.

Last, a pilot study conducted by myself, Tesar (2018), examined the engagement and philanthropic patterns of university alumni who had received a full-tuition academic scholarship as undergraduate students. This phenomenological study interviewed former full-tuition alumni who both gave philanthropic gifts to their alma mater and those who did not. One of the findings from the study was that most alumni were not aware of how much they had been giving to Theodore, and they were surprised to know what their giving was, usually assuming that they had given more. Another implication of this study relates to the finding that the pattern of engagement and involvement drives giving. As one alumnus stated, “I think that people are more personally involved and are given some continued contact or way to impact Theodore, or
any institution, are more likely to give larger amounts and more consistently.” This sentiment was echoed by another alumnus, who said:

I think that the ability to be engaged, be involved has a profound impact. Particularly in this day and age when there’s been unfortunately so many scandals in the not-for-profit world. If one is not engaged with it, it’s really easy to be concerned that, well, how is this money getting used, and what are they doing with it?

This point also relates to SET, as previously discussed. There is an interdependency between the trust and personal connection of the university to its alumni that relates to their philanthropic tendencies and their desire to give back to their alma mater. Other implications and findings from this study included:

- a concern alumni had about how their gifts were used, and if they are going to what the alumni intended;
- most participants were more likely to give if a close connection or friend was asking for a gift, especially if it was a more significant gift;
- alumni had concerns about the student phone-a-thon program; many alumni indicated that they often ignore calls, and they are not impressed with the dialogue that happens if they do connect;
- most alumni said that their partner or spouse was very involved in their decision whether to give back; in the situation where both members of the partnership or house are alumni, it would seem to behoove Theodore University to solicit both alumni equally, and remember to include both alumni in the calls, letters, and other solicitations that happen throughout the year; and
• most alumni preferred to give to specific programs or areas of Theodore that were most meaningful to them, and most of these alumni felt indebted for the full-tuition scholarship they had received.

Examining SET, there were several examples from the subject interviews in this study that related to what Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) discussed regarding reciprocity as a cultural expectation. For example, in this study, there was the feeling of indebtedness to pay back a scholarship that the alumni had received. For some of these alumni, that “debt” had been paid off with their donations already, and so they believed that they had already met their share of the exchange between Theodore and their donations to their alma mater. For these individuals, their decision to give monetary support going forward was motivated by other means, including their sense of community, and for specific projects. For other alumni who had not given as much back to Theodore, there was a sense of transaction that had not been fully paid off yet and was still “owed” by the alumni. Thus, an interpretation and meaning of these exchanges from this study coincides with previous studies in that there is a sense of reciprocity for these alumni that had a full-tuition scholarship and the desire to pay it back, but over time, those desires dissipated, and the decision to give back to their alma mater was based more on personal exchanges and connections that the university provided to the alumni.

In summary, there was a continuing theme in this section of the literature review that linked donor behavior to sex, particularly with females being possibly more engaged or perhaps more willing to give than males. SET was still the predominant theoretical approach, including for the one qualitative study examined.

As stated in previous studies, financial aid received as a student, and the current location of the donor are essential factors in their philanthropic decisions (Marr et al., 2005; Nesbit et al.,
2015). Last, this section has uncovered a connection between donor and alumni giving to the academic college or university athletic department.

**Research on Student-athlete Alumni Philanthropy**

O’Neil and Schenke (2007) suggested that athlete alumni do not give as generously as they could to their alma maters. This quantitative study set out to examine how former student-athletes of one institution in the southwest felt about their alma mater, specifically related to their philanthropic contributions to their institution. Based on other empirical studies, the authors hypothesized that alumni who were student-athletes felt less compelled to give donations to their alma mater because they had already given enough to their schools and might feel more loyalty to the sports team than the institution itself. The research questions for their study were: “Is there a significant difference in athlete alumni’s giving amount to their alma mater based on demographic characteristics?” and “What factors best predict athlete alumni’s giving amount to their alma mater?”

SET was used as a theoretical framework, as the authors believed this theory would be best to analyze whether the athlete alumni’s giving amount was impacted by a perception that they had given more to their alma mater than they had received. Quantitative methods were used in this study. Questionnaires were mailed to all former student-athletes that the university had contact information (N = 2711), and survey results from the survey questionnaire were received from 464 athlete alumni. Variables in the study examined attitudes of the alumni toward the institution, their giving amount, perceptions and behaviors related to their giving, and demographic variables. A regression analysis was used to analyze the data with giving level as the dependent variable.

Findings from the study included that athlete attitudinal factors were predictive of giving amount, consistent with SET. Another finding was that most participants believed that
Southwest School benefited from the athletic teams’ performance, but this did not impact their giving levels. The two most common reasons that athlete alumni did not give were a bad experience at the school and the perception that they had already given resources of their time and talents.

According to O’Neil and Schenke (2007), athlete alumni may believe they have given enough to their schools by playing sports, and they may feel greater loyalty to their former sports teams than their alma maters. Drawing on SET, this study investigated whether such attitudes among athlete alumni at a U.S. university were related to lifetime donations. Results from their study indicated that the quality of alumni’s athletic experience and the perception that they have already given to their school by playing sports are predictive of giving amount, and similar to the general alumni donor, the variables of age, income, and geography were also found to be related to giving level. A limitation of this study was that the data and sample were only from one institution. Another limitation was that more responses for the study came from those who had given no money to Southwest School. Implications and recommendations for future research included a qualitative follow up to determine how university employees could best communicate with this group of alumni, as well as to expand the research to other universities.

Shapiro, Giannoulakis, Drayer, and Wang (2010) completed a study to extend the previous research on donation constraints through the “development of an instrument that measures the degree to which donation barriers exist for athletic alumni” (p. 284). The problem identified by the researchers was that due to the limited knowledge on donation constraints and the vast potential of former athletes as a source for charitable contributions, it was “pivotal to understand why a significant portion of athletic alumni choose not to donate monetary support to their alma mater” (p. 284).
The research question in this study was vague and consisted of “generating an instrument that can be used to measure former athlete donation constraints, which is underdeveloped in the sport management literature. This study will also provide a practical understanding of donation barriers for athletic alumni” (Shapiro et al., 2010, p. 284). The authors first created a Former Student-Athlete Donor Constraint Scale (FSADCS) that was created through an extensive scale development process (p. 284). Next, an online survey was sent to 750 former athlete non-donors from a NCAA Division I public institution in the Rocky Mountain region. A total of 243 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 36.4% (p. 288).

In reporting the results and conclusions, the authors stated that two general areas of deficiency were worth noting. First, there was a gap between the experience that some current student-athletes received for support during their time at the university and the fact that they were not informed about the importance of donations to add to their student-athlete experience. The authors stated, “the process of recruiting former student-athletes to donate needs to begin while that individual is a current athlete” (Shapiro et al., 2010, p. 292). The second major area of deficiency was about the communication, or lack thereof, to former student-athletes and tying that communication to the donation process. The authors stated, “beginning with its current student-athletes, an athletic department should work towards developing a database of all student-athletes (current and former) and maintain regular and personalized communication with them” (p. 292). A critique of this study was that no conceptual or theoretical framework was provided. The authors also noted several limitations to their study, including how the FSADCS was initially developed and measured on one sample.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

As referenced in the literature review, several previous studies around alumni philanthropy have used SET. I also used the theoretical framework of SET, as defined and
previously researched by Blau (1964), Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), Emerson (1976), Mathur (1996), and others for this research study. SET can be traced back to George Homans (1958) in his article *Social Behavior as Exchange*. Over time, other scholars further defined the theory. Cropanzano and Mitchell defined SET as a series of interactions that generate obligations. Within SET, “these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person” (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). One of the basic tenets of SET is that relationships evolve into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments.

Blau’s study (1964) related to SET suggested that people seek recognition and trust when building an exchange, and not just in economic terms. Mathur (1996) examined SET in the context of motivations for gift giving to charitable organizations. Mathur used SET as a framework for identifying rewards that older adults seek through giving. Mathur suggested that SET was especially suitable for this purpose because charitable contributions may be motivated by self-interest, altruism, or agnostic reasons, among other things. Among the implications that Mathur suggested for nonprofit organizations based on his research were:

- to establish long-term relationships with their donors. The solution to motivating donors may be to get to know them very well, to the extent that they can be sent real personal letters. Another implication for nonprofit organizations is that they may offer greater control to their donors over how their contribution will be used. (p. 119)

The limitations in using SET for this study should be noted, particularly related to the interdependency of the exchange that many authors of the theory suggest, but this study examined the independent experiences of the subjects.

However, using SET as the framework for this study allowed me to explore, within the subgroup population of former student-athletes at Theodore University, what type of interactions
generate giving, and what motivations exist within this population that evoke the response to make a charitable contribution. SET is aligned with my methodology, a case study, as I attempted to explore the intricate details with each alumnus and relate those experiences for each individual to the reciprocity or exchange feelings of philanthropy in SET that they may have with their alma mater.

Chapter Summary

Upon review of the literature, there are perhaps several intrinsic and extrinsic reasons that alumni give back to their alma mater, which can be loosely divided into three categories: the individuals’ experiences at their institution, the perceived need and outcome for their philanthropic gifts, and the connectedness the alumni feel with their alma mater. Given this background information, I chose to frame this study around these assumptions and to test its validity around a subset of alumni who were unique in that they were student-athletes at their university alma mater.

Given the need for further investigation of qualitative research into alumni giving propensities as noted by these other researchers and the ever-changing landscape of philanthropy in higher education, this study hoped to reveal additional best practices in communicating and soliciting for alumni monetary support, particularly for those alumni who are former student-athletes.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe how and why alumni experience their philanthropic giving decisions to Theodore University, specifically for those alumni who were student-athletes while they were attending Theodore. In this chapter I will discuss the following: the epistemological stance and positionality of the researcher, the methods, sampling and participants used in the study, the data collection and analysis processes, and validity and ethical considerations in this study.

A case study approach, using interview methods, was used to gauge the phenomenon of alumni philanthropy, along with the propensity and intrinsic desires of these alumni to choose to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore University. I asked two broad questions to guide this study: “What have the individuals experienced in terms of the phenomenon of giving back to their alma mater?” and “What context or situations have typically influenced or affected their experiences of the phenomenon of giving back to their alma mater?” This study was constructed from a pilot study conducted in 2018 of Theodore University alumni who had a full-tuition academic scholarship as students and analyzed their philanthropic tendencies as alumni (Tesar, 2018).

The specific research questions the researcher answered were as follows: (1) Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore? (2) How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore? (3) What are their motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?

The motivation for this study came from a gap in the recent scholarly literature about the psychology and altruism of philanthropic support of alumni to their alma mater. While there
have been many scholarly articles written about philanthropic support of colleges and universities over the past 20 years, very few were focused on a particular subset of alumni.

Furthermore, few qualitative studies have been published on the patterns of philanthropic giving by university alumni, including those who are former student-athletes.

**Epistemological Stance**

The epistemological stance for this research was a constructivist viewpoint, as previously defined and studied by a number of scholars. Rockmore (2005) described epistemology as “the problem of knowing a mind-independent external world as it is” (p. 25). Lee (2012) stated:

> Epistemology is a theory of knowledge that explores the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable, or between the knower and the respondent…where the knower and the respondent cocreate understandings. To cocreate understandings implies some kind of interaction between the inquirer and the knowable. (p. 407)

A constructivist viewpoint aligns with a case study design and the research questions guiding this study. This was exhibited in the work of other researchers who focused on case study research, primarily Stake (1995), Merriam (2009) and Yin (2002). According to Baxter and Jack (2008):

> both Stake and Yin base their approach to case study on a constructivist paradigm.

Constructivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective. This paradigm recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning but doesn’t reject outright some notion of objectivity. (p. 545)

Similarly, Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa (2012) stated:

> the qualitative case study approach described by Stake falls within the constructivist paradigm. Stake’s case studies explicitly seek out the multiple perspectives of those involved in the case, aiming to gather collectively agreed upon and diverse notions of
what occurred. The ontological belief is that reality is local and specifically constructed. (p. 5)

Yazan (2015) analyzed approaches to case study research, particularly cross-referencing the work of Stake (1995), Merriam (2009) and Yin (2002). According to Yazan, in terms of her epistemological stance, Merriam seemed to be much closer to Stake’s viewpoint than Yin’s. Yazan believed that Merriam’s epistemology would orient qualitative case study toward constructivism since Merriam (1998) maintained, “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based in the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (p. 6). Yazan (2015) wrote about Merriam:

she elucidates the two lines of interpretation or meaning-making that the reality in the ultimate report has undergone: The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own. (p. 138)

Comparison of case study research was important in my study because I was analyzing the reality of the alumni research participants, trying to determine what their experiences were like at Theodore University, and how that translated to philanthropy; but also bringing my own perspectives into the analysis as a researcher, alumnus of Theodore, and employee of Theodore University, which I address later in my positionality.

Other authors who use qualitative analysis also reflect on a constructivist approach. Rockmore (2005) described a constructivist approach as “based not on metaphysical realism, or the world as it really is, but on empirical realism, or the contents of ordinary experience” (p. 25). Moreover, “constructivism means that new experiences are internalized by linking them to past
experiences and items of knowledge” (p. 30). This was relevant to my study, as I was analyzing why student-athlete alumni of Theodore University felt compelled, or less compelled, to give back by providing philanthropic support to their alma mater, and perhaps connecting their experiences as students to their giving patterns as alumni. It should be noted that I took a constructivist approach to this study after examining social constructionism and constructionist assumptions related to epistemologies in case study research.

My study revolved around what and how questions which is in line with the constructionist approach that Charmaz (2008) believed that constructionist grounded theorists need to address as they seek to understand empirical phenomena “and contend that this understanding must be located in the studied specific circumstances of the research process” (p. 398). Charmaz (2008) believed that a constructionist approach makes certain assumptions including that reality is construed under particular conditions, the research takes into account the researcher’s positionality, as well as that of the participants, and that, “the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it” (p. 402).

Andrews (2012) challenged Charmaz’s (2008) views of constructionist assumptions while defining his view of social constructionism:

Social constructionism accepts that there is an objective reality. It is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and understood . . . social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in as the focus of enquiry . . . The terms constructivism and social constructionism tend to be used interchangeably and subsumed under the generic term “constructivism” . . .
Constructivism proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes while social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus. It is less interested if at all in the cognitive processes that accompany knowledge. (p. 1)

Andrews’ (2012) views of constructivism aligned with one of the founding researchers of this epistemology, Jean Piaget (1952). Ültanır (2012) described Piaget’s initial research in this field, by stating:

Piaget’s main focus of constructivism has to do with the individual and how the individual constructs knowledge. Piaget’s theory of cognitive constructivism proposes that humans cannot be given information, which they immediately understand and use; instead, humans must construct their own knowledge. (p. 202)

My approach to research aligns with Piaget (1952), Andrews (2012), and others that our reality and the way we gain knowledge is internal to us and constructed through our myriad of past experiences and prior knowledge. To this end, as a researcher, I brought my construction of reality to this case study, which was then interpreted through the participants’ constructions of philanthropy, the phenomenon being studied. I made this decision of a constructivist approach in my research because this was the best way to answer my research questions. My epistemological approach of constructivism also aligned with the general research philosophy of this study, and the theoretical framework of SET, as previously defined in Chapter 2. Specifically, aligning with a constructivist approach guided my research by assuming that truth is relative and dependent on my research subjects’ perspectives and that SET helped answer my research questions by assuming the reciprocity or exchange feelings that these alumni may or may not
have with their alma mater. SET is also aligned with my methodology, a case study, as I attempted to explore the intricate details with each alumnus.

**Positionality**

After identifying my theoretical and epistemological framework, I needed to define my positionality in qualitative research, as it shaped my choices in methods, analysis, and findings in this study. Positionality can be viewed as the researcher’s subjectivity related to their own experiences and those of their study participants.

Bourke (2014) described positionality as:

The cogency of the research process rises from the relationship between the research instrument (the researcher) and the participants. . . . Positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet. . . . To achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to remain objective but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities. Such is positionality. We have to acknowledge who we are as individuals, and as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions. (p. 3)

When addressing my positionality and bias as a researcher in this topic, I first must identify myself as both an alumnus of Theodore, and a current employee of Theodore University who works in the university advancement office. From a race and sex perspective, most of the individuals I interviewed were Caucasian, which is what I identify as too, which would make me an insider from this perspective. Some of the participants I interviewed were female, which would give me an outsider perspective related to sex. From the viewpoint of giving monetary support to Theodore, I have given philanthropic gifts to Theodore, but I was not a student-athlete when I was a student at Theodore. These are the considerations that were made when establishing my positionality and researcher bias for this study.
Being an outsider as a non-student-athlete alumnus made me critically reflect on what my views of student-athletes’ experiences in college may or may not have been like. Before beginning this research, I assumed that most student-athletes had close to a full-ride scholarship, and while working very hard to compete athletically, and succeed in their coursework, perhaps enjoyed a financial and social benefit over non-student-athletes. For example, in addition to perhaps having more financial aid, student-athletes may have had access to tutors and other academic support that non-student-athletes did not have. Similarly, my experiences in college as a white male resulted in my views and perspectives of the process of going to, attending, and graduating from college, which I recognize may have been very different as a non-white student, or as a female student.

From a constructivist epistemology, and SET view, I have a bias because I believe in giving back to one’s alma mater and have made contributions to my alma mater for several years. My constructivist viewpoint is that my experiences at Theodore were very positive, and I believe that my sense of exchange with Theodore as a philanthropic alumnus will only be fulfilled after I donate money to Theodore because of the lived experiences I had as a student and alumnus at Theodore. Also, growing up, my mother was philanthropic and bestowed upon me the desire to be philanthropic as well. This bias connotes that my views as a researcher were skewed toward believing that one should give back to their alma mater.

To mitigate these biases, acknowledge my positionality in this study, and make myself more objective in the research process, I was purposefully reflective and critical in my interview questions, analysis, and when writing the findings and implications for this study. In my interview protocol and interview questions, I took time first to understand the lived experiences of the participants while they were attending Theodore while not making assumptions about
what, how, and why they may feel the way they do. As I worked through the interview questions, I asked probing follow-up questions to understand better their lived experiences as student-athletes, regardless of their sex, race, and philanthropic support. This detail was then transferred into the analysis of the interview data, as my coding methods provided an opportunity for a rich and thick analysis of each participant’s answers. During the data analysis, I often paused to reflect on participants’ answers concerning how they related to my positionality, many times noting the differences and similarities of my lived experiences as the researcher compared to those of the participants. After completion of the analysis, I continued to reflect on my subjectivity concerning the research topic compared to the objectivity of my participants’ statements when writing the findings and implications for this study.

Methods

I chose to use a case study research approach to this investigation based primarily on the research of Merriam (2009). The reason for selecting this methodological approach came after reviewing and analyzing the overall purpose and traditions of qualitative research. These five traditions of qualitative inquiry were described by Creswell (1998) as biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. In Creswell’s book, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Traditions*, he outlined several examples of these five different types of qualitative studies. Creswell suggested:

> choose a case study to examine a “case” bounded in time or place and look for contextual material about the setting of the “case.” Gather extensive material from multiple sources of information to provide an in-depth picture of the “case.” (p. 40)

When looking at data collection differences in the five different inquiries, Creswell (1998) noted:
Biographers, phenomenologists, and ground theorists study individuals; case study researchers examine groups of individuals participating in an event, or activity or organization; and ethnographers study entire cultural systems or some subcultures of the systems. (p. 134)

Based on the research topic of studying former student-athletes at Theodore University and their philanthropic giving to their alma mater, a case study approach was most appropriate. Specifically, my case was student-athlete alumni at Theodore University bounded by the parameters that they were Theodore alumni and participated in a varsity sport while a student. Within this case, the phenomenon I analyzed was their philanthropic giving patterns to Theodore now as alumni.

When examining and defining case studies, several authors were researched, including Merriam (1998), Yin (2002), Stake (1995), and Bartlett and Vavrus (2017). In their texts on case study methodology, Yin, Merriam, and Stake diverged in the definition of case and case study. For instance, Yin defined a case as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (p. 13). Yin stated, “how and why questions are likely to favor the use of case studies, experiments, or histories” (p. 7).

Yin (2002) continued:

The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated . . . and includes direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events. The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence. (p. 8)
According to Yin, “you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p. 13).

As for the definition of case, Stake (1995) agreed with Louis Smith’s (1978) rendition: researchers should view case as “a bounded system” and inquire into it “as an object rather than a process” (p. 2). He depicted some of the attributes of case in his conceptualization: case is “a specific, a complex, functioning thing,” more specifically “an integrated system,” which “has a boundary and working parts” and “purposive (in social sciences and human services)” (p. 2). Stake stated, “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (p. 8). The case study work of Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) was also examined in determining the methods for this study. Bartlett and Vavrus used a comparative case study approach particularly suited to social research about practice and policy (p. 1). Like Merriam (1998), Bartlett and Vavrus considered the comparative case study approach to be heuristic. According to Bartlett and Vavrus, “Comparative case studies adopt a processual stance to re-envision three key concepts in case study research: culture, context, and comparison. The object of study is the phenomenon of interest. In short, context is made; it is relational and spatial” (p. 12).

Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) differed from Merriam (1998) in their belief that case studies should be bounded; instead, they called for an unbounding that focuses on attention to scale and not just the local context and current moment. A summary of Bartlett and Vavrus’ comparative case study model was stated as:
Instead of this a priori bounding of the case, the comparative case study approach features an iterative and contingent tracing of relevant factors, actors, and features. The approach is aimed at exploring the historical and contemporary processes that have produced a sense of shared place, purpose, or identity. (p. 39)

Initially, I reflected on comparing a previous qualitative study conducted at Theodore University (Tesar, 2018) with that of this case study of student-athlete alumni but opted to use a qualitative case study approach more in line with Merriam.

For Merriam (2009), a “case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. The single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (p. 40). Merriam stated:

the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study. For it to be a case study, one particular program, or one bounded system selected on the basis of typicality, uniqueness, success would be the unit of analysis. (p. 41)

Merriam continued:

qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. (p. 44)

In a revised book on qualitative research and case studies Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further defined what a qualitative case study is:
We have concluded that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study: the case. . . . The case, then, could be a single person . . . a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy. (p. 38)

In this latest edition, Merriam and Tisdell made note about using their case study approach, but also using multiple cases to enhance a broad qualitative study, stating, “The inclusion of multiple cases is a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” (p. 40). Merriam’s (2009) approach seemed most appropriate for the present study because the phenomenon under study was philanthropic inclinations bounded by student-athlete alumni at one Midwest university. Further differences and distinctions of case study approaches were analyzed through Yazan (2015), where she summarized the differences in case study approaches among Merriam (1998, 2002, 2009), Stake (1995), and Yin (2002). Because of Merriam’s (1998, 2002, 2009) definition of using a unit of analysis for a case study based on its uniqueness, and her definition of case studies being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, this was the best approach to my case study research.

In summary, my case study incorporated these elements as defined by Merriam (1998, 2002, 2009). The phenomenon under the present case study was the philanthropic patterns and tendencies of alumni to Theodore University; the case subjects were bounded and were those alumni of Theodore who were student-athletes attempting to explain and analyze their giving habits to Theodore during the period since becoming alumni to the present. Within a constructivism epistemology, and SET, the steps in this research design had characteristics of Merriam’s (1998, 2002, 2009) case studies, “focusing on a particular situation or phenomenon; thick description of the phenomenon under study; illuminating reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Yazan, 2015, p. 148).
This methodological approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to explore, in depth with a thick and rich description, why and how subjects described their experience as alumni and being (or not being) philanthropic. It also allowed for a comparison of previous case study research conducted with alumni philanthropy in the discussion and implications section. My research is relevant because it adds a qualitative study to the already existing quantitative literature on university alumni philanthropy, taking an in-depth look into the subject by identifying unique alumni populations and their reasoning for choosing either to give, or not give, monetary support to their alma mater.

**Participants and Sampling**

I identified 27 participants for this study. An overview of the case study research participants is summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

*Table 4. Theodore University Case Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theodore University Student-Athlete Alumni</th>
<th>Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants in study</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of men in study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of women in study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number living in-state</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number living out-of-state</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number giving less than $500 total lifetime</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number giving more than $500 total lifetime</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number giving less than $500 to athletics</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number giving more than $500 to athletics</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different sports teams represented</td>
<td>9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number with an athletic scholarship, full or partial</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number without an athletic scholarship</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number that competed on their team for the majority of their time at Theodore</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of participants with a spouse that was also a Theodore alumni</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Theodore University Case Study Participants, Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theodore University Case Study Participants, Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Scholarship Status*</th>
<th>Giving Amount**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zach</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dustin</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&gt;$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>&lt;$500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. * = self-disclosed athletic scholarship amount.  
** = lifetime giving to Theodore, greater than or less than $500.

I used purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) to determine the participants for this study. This was an appropriate method because I was looking to interview a specific group of individuals (i.e., Theodore University alumni who were student-athletes as undergraduate students). I reached out to them based on their characteristics of when they graduated from.
Theodore, whether they have been giving monetary support to Theodore since graduating, and whether they played a varsity sport when they were students at Theodore. To find the persons I interviewed, I utilized the list of alumni who were student-athletes that the Theodore University Alumni and Advancement Office keeps and maintains and allowed me to use for this project. I reached out to this specific group of alumni via email and telephone to arrange interviews (see Appendix B). Interviews were conducted in person and over the telephone. I selected the individuals for this study based on those who responded positively to my request for an interview while being mindful of the participant’s age, graduation year, sex, and what sport they played at Theodore (e.g., not all former basketball players). Going off of the list that Theodore had provided, I reached out to 40 different alumni at a time over email or phone, until I felt that I had enough interview participants (27).

In this study, I purposefully excluded alumni who had graduated less than 10 years before. The reason for this is that individuals who graduated recently may not have had enough time to build enough wealth to make a monetary gift to Theodore. Also, to have a diverse sample of both individuals who give monetary support to Theodore, and those who do not, I separated eligible alumni into one of two categories: those alumni who had given $500 or more to Theodore in their lifetime or had given a gift in the past 10 years, and those alumni who had given less than $500 in their lifetime and had not given a gift in the past 10 years. The reason for this was to identify some unique personal characteristics or attributes that lent themselves to philanthropic giving (or not giving) to Theodore, within a case study approach. The reason for selecting $500 was because this was the amount typically used by Theodore to separate small from more substantial gifts. As stated earlier, I wanted to choose alumni who had graduated
from Theodore at least 10 years before to allow those individuals enough time to grow in their careers, build some wealth, and pay off any student loans.

**Data Collection**

According to Merriam (2002):

there are three major sources of data for qualitative research—interviews, observations, and documents. The data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study and by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question. (p. 12)

The data collection method I used was interviews. This source of data collection was most appropriate for this study, as it provided an in-depth, thick, and rich description of the phenomenon of alumni philanthropic giving to Theodore University.

Interviews were conducted over the telephone and in person, and lasted for approximately 60 minutes, depending on the depth and breadth of the answers provided. The reason the interviews were around 60 minutes, and no longer in duration, is because of the time constraints of the individuals I interviewed.

When considering a level of saturation in my interviews, I again looked to Palinkas et al. (2015) as a guide to determine when I reached the appropriate level of interviewees for this study. Palinkas et al. stated:

Ideally, the goal of achieving theoretical saturation by providing as much detail as possible involves selection of individuals or cases that can ensure all aspects of that phenomenon are included in the examination and that any one aspect is thoroughly examined. (p. 7)

To that end, I reached a saturation level of knowledge with these interviews because I had a diverse pool of participants in the sport they played, their academic major, when they graduated,
their sex, and their location. Furthermore, the interview questions went into enough detail to answer my research questions, as well as providing an opportunity for participants to answer them fully and completely, and to talk freely and openly about their views and opinions. I knew a level of saturation had been reached when I began to see reoccurring answers and patterns to my interview questions. There was a point during the research that no new information was emerging from the interviews despite the diversity in the pool of participants. It was at this point that I knew I could satisfactorily answer my research questions.

The interview protocol (appendix A) first went over the informed consent document and an outline of the interview questions that I had emailed to the participants in advance. I explained to the participants that this research project focused on the propensity of select Theodore University alumni to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore as a philanthropic gift. I explained that the goal in this research was to learn more about philanthropic support of higher education, and I hoped to learn about unique characteristics of alumni who engaged in philanthropic giving to their alma mater. The results of this research provide useful information to senior leaders at higher education institutions in helping them to develop, structure, and manage their alumni outreach and communication related to monetary support and philanthropic giving from university alumni. Broadly, my interview questions asked about the lived experiences of each alumni, their philanthropic tendencies as alumni, and if there was a sense of reciprocity or exchange in their decision to give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore. For example, some of the interview questions were:

1. Looking back at your overall experience at Theodore as an undergraduate student, how pleased were you with your time at Theodore? What made your time at Theodore memorable, enjoyable, or helpful to you personally or professionally?
What concerns did you have during your time at Theodore either as a student or as an alumnus?

2. Why do you feel that alumni should or should not give monetary support to Theodore? Do you feel the same way, or differently?

3. How would you describe a philanthropic person? Would you consider yourself to fit this description? How do you view your philanthropic giving to Theodore?

4. Do you give monetary support to any other nonprofit organizations (e.g., religious organizations, charities)? If so, how does your monetary support of these other nonprofit organizations compare to your philanthropic support of Theodore?

5. You were a student-athlete at Theodore. (You did or did not have a scholarship as a student-athlete). Does that fact have an influence on your propensity to give, or not to give, monetary support to Theodore now as an alumnus? Why do you feel this way?

At the end of the interview questions, time was given to the participants to share any other thoughts or comments about their philanthropic, monetary support of Theodore, either in the past, currently, or in the future. The complete interview protocol and questions for this study are in Appendix A.

While conducting the interviews, and after receiving permission to record the conversation, I used a recording and transcription application called VoiceRecorder, which is an application for iPhones. This allowed me to record the interviews. After the interviews had been conducted, I reviewed the recording of the interviews, and then uploaded the electronic file to an Internet service, Rev.com, for transcription. Rev.com provided a transcription of the interview, which was downloaded into a Word document. After reviewing the transcriptions of the
interviews, I uploaded the Word document files and the corresponding audio files to a software program called NVivo. Once the files were in NVivo, I began to take notes on the interviews and code the interviews using the NVivo program to look for relevant trends and themes that could be used to answer my research questions, which I discuss in my data analysis section. The security of the data was protected through the encryption and security protocols of Rev.com and NVivo.

**Data Analysis**

According to Merriam (2002):

> data analysis is essentially an inductive strategy. One begins with a unit of data and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data. These patterns are given names (codes) and are refined and adjusted as the analysis proceeds. (p. 14)

In addition to Merriam (2002), I used the work of Russo-Netzer and Mayseless (2014) as a guide for the data analysis. The first step in the data analysis process was listening to each interview again and rereading each interview transcript separately to get an overall sense of the participants’ lived experiences. All interviews were then listened to twice, and transcriptions were read several times until a sense of immersion in the material was obtained.

When choosing a word, phrase or paragraph to assign as a code I used an inductive coding strategy. This method was appropriate as I did not know much about this heuristic research subject before I began the study, and I built the codes and coding structure based on the data that was presented. Since this was an exploratory research study most of the data was initially coded in order to help form a narrative.

Statements or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon were highlighted and identified in a first cycle line-by-line coding in NVivo.
Holton (2010) stated, “Line-by-line coding forces the researcher to verify and saturate categories, minimizes missing an important category, and ensures relevance by generating codes with emergent fit to the substantive area under study” (p. 24). Line-by-line coding was the appropriate method for this first cycle coding, as it allowed me a detailed review of each interview transcript.

In this first coding cycle, an affective approach was taken using values coding. Saldana (2015) stated, “affective coding methods investigate subjective qualities of human experience by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences” (p. 124). Saldana stated that values coding is an affective method of coding because it “assesses a participant’s integrated value, attitude, and belief systems at work” (p. 124).

I used a values coding method as described by Gable and Wolf (1993) and Saldana (2015). Gable and Wolf described values coding as “the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (p. 131). Saldana described values coding as “the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (p. 131). Saldana described a value as “the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea” (p. 131). Saldana stated, “Values coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that explore cultural values and belief systems, identity, intrapersonal, and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies” (p. 132). Saldana continued, “values coding is applicable not only to interview transcripts . . . and other participant-generated materials” (p. 132). Using the work of Saldana (2015) and Gable and Wolf (1993) as a guide I identified 79 initial codes; some examples of these initial codes were “athletics was a big part of my experience,” “church is a higher priority,”
“feelings of indebtedness,” “personal connections,” “others involved in my decisions,” and “lack of recognition.” This coding approach yielded the best analysis to identify the essence of the phenomenon of giving, or not giving, to Theodore University because of the importance in the consideration of values, beliefs, experiences, and actions of the alumni research subjects represented in this case study, as well as their identity related to Theodore University alumni.

After finishing the line-by-line coding, I had a plethora, and disorganized collection of codes. At this point I put similar codes into the same categories in order to analyze the data more succinctly. By analyzing and sorting the codes into categories, I was be able to detect consistent and overarching themes in the data.

To move on to find patterns and themes in the data, I used the coding process described by Saldana (2015), which “condenses a larger number of sequential split odes into a more manageable lump for analysis” (p. 229). For example, “personal connections related to philanthropy,” and “others involved in my philanthropic decisions” were two subsequent codes that emerged from this process. This led to my second cycle coding method of pattern coding. Saldana defined pattern coding as, “a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes or concepts . . . pattern codes identify an emergent theme, configuration or explanation” (p. 236). Before going through this second cycle of coding, I revisited my research questions, (1) Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore? (2) How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore? (3) What are their motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?

This second method of coding the data resulted in pattern codes that helped answer my research questions, including, “There is not a feeling of already gave to Theodore with my time
and athletic talents as a student-athlete,” “Giving more philanthropic support to other organizations because Theodore is not a philanthropic priority,” “The connection I have to my athletic team, the athletic department and my coaches is my strongest motivator to give to Theodore,” and “The geographic distance from Theodore impacts my desire to give back.” This second cycle of coding resulted in distinct categories concerning why participants were, or were not, philanthropic to Theodore, how these participants viewed their philanthropy with their alma mater, and what their motivations were to give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore.

This categorization of codes led to a narrowing of 26 broader pattern codes that began to reflect themes in the data. Categories were divided into overarching themes and sub-categories that supported the themes. This data narrowing process into codes, recoding, and then categories led to 11 core themes to answer the research questions. I used Saldana (2015) as a guide to when I could conceptualize a theory:

the stage at which I seem to find a theory emerging is when there are categories of categories . . . it is at this point that a level of abstraction occurs which transcends the particulars of a study, enabling generalizable transfer to other comparable contexts. (p. 278)

Themes and theories that emerged were then clustered to construct a description of the participants’ experiences. When thinking about how to answer the research questions best, and after coding the data, and identifying relevant pattern and themes, I divided the findings for this study into 11 categorical themes, including:

- findings related to student-athlete alumni’s affinity for Theodore;
- findings on gift solicitations for Theodore;
- findings related to communication from Theodore to student-athlete alumni;
• findings related to motivations of student-athlete alumni;
• findings on why alumni do not give donations;
• related findings on philanthropy to Theodore and motivations to give;
• findings on motivations for student-athlete alumni to give and not give to Theodore;
• findings about philanthropic tendencies of participants;
• findings related to connections at Theodore;
• other findings related to student-athlete alumni’s propensity to give to Theodore; and
• findings related to experiences at Theodore.

Last, the data and interview information were combined with relevant literature to produce this dissertation that describes the findings of the data, as well as implications of the data related to the study and research of philanthropy and charitable giving at Theodore University.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

According to Merriam (2002), “in qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ interpretations or understandings of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 25). To seek validity in this study, I also used triangulation. Merriam stated that triangulation occurs when “the researcher collects data through a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis” (p. 25). I took what I learned in the participant interviews and observed whether the information given was consistent with Theodore University alumni documents and personal communication with Theodore administrators in charge of alumni outreach and development. Specifically, I reviewed past solicitation attempts by Theodore with these alumni to determine whether they generated a response to give or not. For example, I determined whether particular solicitation attempts by
athletics or the university as a whole had an impact in the propensity of the research subjects to give a monetary donation. I also reviewed these documents for content, messaging, and to clarify the target audience of these past solicitation attempts. In addition to reviewing past individual solicitation attempts, I also analyzed the overall historical giving data by Theodore alumni presented in aggregate in this dissertation. By reviewing the information that Theodore keeps on its alumni’s philanthropy responses to solicitation attempts and its comprehensive philanthropy data, I was able to understand further the meaning and reality of what the alumni research subjects disclosed in the interview process. I also had personal meetings with different Theodore administrators who oversaw alumni solicitations. These meetings allowed me further insights into what I was learning from the participant interviews, and to obtain a broader understanding and historical context of philanthropy at Theodore.

Also, to build trust with the research participants, I presented my findings to the individuals I interviewed for the study if they were willing and able to have a follow-up meeting. This member checking effort, as mentioned by Merriam (2002) and others, allowed the participants in this study to judge the accuracy of the findings and my interpretation of them. Of those participants who provided feedback on the initial findings, all agreed with what I had found thus far in the study. Following the conclusion of this study, the final dissertation will also be shared with all participants for them to review and consider the implications of the study findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were made for this study. The nature of the research questions asked participants to reveal information about their philanthropic habits that may have elicited emotional discomfort. Because the research questions asked participants about how they spent or gave away their money, and if they viewed themselves as philanthropic to both Theodore and
other nonprofit organizations, this may have caused interviewees some embarrassment or stigmatization if their participation had become known. Because some of the answers on how much money an individual gives as philanthropic gifts could be viewed as confidential or private, anonymity and confidentiality were protected by not sharing the names or describing factors of the individuals interviewed for this study.

To uphold ethical standards and protect confidentiality, it was made known to the interviewees that their personal information would not be disclosed at any point in the recruitment process, data collection/interviews, or during the post-interview discussion. The recruitment letter for this study outlined the details of the study to participants. Additionally, an informed consent document (Appendix C) was signed by all participants before the interviews began. When writing the findings for this project, no subjects were identified by their name. Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews, as well as signed consent forms, were kept on CyBox, a secure cloud storage application. No physical copies of the recordings or transcriptions were kept. A code key was also created that kept interviewees’ names identified only as pseudonyms in files in CyBox. Additionally, Theodore University is a pseudonym for the actual university that was studied.

**Limitations**

There were limitations to this study, and these limitations had impacts on the findings. The transferability of this study was one limitation. This study focused on student-athlete alumni and had relevant findings for researchers studying this population. Because the sample population focused on student-athlete alumni, this study may not be transferable to the philanthropic inclinations of other higher education populations. Furthermore, this study’s findings were primarily focused on practitioner implications, what the findings meant for those
who work in higher education fundraising and development. Thus, this study may not be transferable to those researching higher education policy and theory related to philanthropy.

Furthermore, the sample group of research subjects may not be a completely accurate cross-sample of the entire alumni population related to those alumni who give versus those who do not give philanthropic support. There was also a limitation in the ethnicity, sex, and sports diversity in the sample population for this case study. For example, even though this case study was bound by student-athlete alumni at Theodore University, not every sport was represented in this study. Furthermore, in the entire population of student-athlete alumni at Theodore, there are many more individuals who do not give philanthropic gifts compared to those who do give monetary support to Theodore. While the sample population in this study did have some diversity among those participants who gave versus those who did not, many more individuals in the total population were still non-givers. This skew of non-givers in the total population compared to those in the sample population was a limitation of this study. These limitations may restrict the use of this research study for immediate practical purposes to other institutions and their alumni, and athletic and advancement offices.

Summary

This qualitative comparative case study intended to describe how and why alumni experience their philanthropic giving decisions concerning Theodore University, specifically for those alumni who were student-athletes while attending Theodore. Under an umbrella of a constructionist epistemology, and aligning with SET, a case study approach using interview methods was implemented to gauge the phenomenon of alumni philanthropy along with the propensity and intrinsic desires of these alumni to choose to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore University. Using this methodology, I determined what individuals have
experienced in terms of the phenomenon of giving to their alma mater and what context or situations have typically influenced or affected their experiences of giving to their alma mater.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

When summarizing the findings for this study, I organized the chapter by the research questions: (1) Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore? (2) How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore? (3) What are their motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore? Within the findings for each research question, I further divided the findings for this study into several categories, including:

- findings on gift solicitations for Theodore;
- findings related to communication from Theodore to student-athlete alumni;
- recognition of alumni;
- findings about philanthropic tendencies of participants;
- findings related to connections at Theodore; and
- findings related to experiences at Theodore.

**Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore?**

When reviewing my first research question: “Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore?”, the answer can best be summarized as going from the general to the specific. Generally, the participants in this study wanted their university, and their athletic program to be better than it was when they were students. This primary tenant of not wanting their alma mater to be worse off generally warranted nominal giving, sometimes in exchange for tickets or other athletic benefits. There was not a sense of obligation to give, both from scholarship and non-scholarship student-athletes.
The scholarship student-athletes in this study did feel a sense of indebtedness for their athletic and educational experiences at Theodore, but for some, this desire to give to the institution that gave them a scholarship was overridden by several things including lack of financial resources, lack of a specific request for specific project, lack of a personal connection for the request, lack of a connection at the university or in the athletic department, and more critical philanthropic interests and ideals. Most participants did feel a stronger sense of obligation to their team and to the athletic department and would feel more compelled to give to athletics, or at least partially to athletics, because they were student-athletes. This led to the specific—those participants who had a closer connection to the university and had been approached for a specific request to support Theodore were more likely to give, give more frequently, and give larger amounts.

Athletics and playing their sport were deciding factors to come to Theodore for all participants even though not all alumni in this study played for the majority of their time at Theodore. Some participants had multiple scholarship offers to play their sport at other universities, and other participants were walk-ons who came to Theodore without a clear path to play sports.

Study participants had an overwhelming desire for Theodore to be a better institution, more viable, and more well-known than when they were there as students. The student-athlete alumni in this study want to give back to Theodore because they want to perpetuate its standing as a great university and make the value of their degree stronger. This sentiment was expressed in overarching tones, but also explicitly related to academic programs, the athletic teams, and the stature of athletic programs. This theme was shared among all participants regardless of their past giving to the institution. Many participants indicated this intense desire for Theodore to be
better, along with their strong affection for their alma mater, but they did not give monetary donations when solicited to make a gift. This cause and effect finding indicates a gap between what alumni desire for their institution—to be a better university than when they were there, and for the athletic teams to be even more successful, but in some cases, there was an unwillingness to personally invest in the success of the institution to help in this endeavor. This gap exists not only because of the philanthropic inclinations and interests of the research participants, but also their financial resources. When asked about this gap, some alumni recognized that universities were in an awkward position to raise funds and advance the university with limited resources. Other alumni made assumptions that others were giving more, and the university should be able to tap into a variety of resources. For many though, the overarching desire for Theodore to be better, to be a national brand, to have the highest quality academic programs, and to win athletic contests was not met with a personal investment of monetary support because there was a lack of a compelling story or need to give to a particular cause or project.

When asked about why they chose to give or not give to Theodore, for most alumni, there was not a sense of obligation that they must give to Theodore, which was different than how some participants viewed their obligation to give to their church as an example. This was true for scholarship and non-scholarship student-athletes who participated in this study. For those alumni who had an athletic scholarship there was a sense that they were fortunate to have had the opportunity to have that scholarship, and to compete for Theodore (even if they had multiple NCAA Division I athletic scholarship offers before choosing Theodore), but there was not a propensity to give monetary donations to Theodore just because of their scholarship. Instead, the scholarship student-athletes in this study did feel a sense of indebtedness for their athletic and educational experiences at Theodore, but for some, this desire to give back to the institution that
gave them a scholarship was trumped by several things including lack of financial resources, lack of a specific request for specific project, lack of a personal connection for the request, lack of a connection at the university or in the athletic department, and more important philanthropic interests and ideals. As Harrison indicated:

My feelings for Theodore are those that I’m very fond of Theodore. I’m really thankful for them having considered me to return. I’m thankful for the full scholarship, and I look at the people who directed me onto my course and career as to be absolutely wonderful, tremendously open people and that it was a great experience there.

When asked about how athletic experience and athletic scholarship impact or do not impact monetary donations to Theodore, the same participant said:

I don’t have any other way to support them and to provide small amounts of donations over the years. . . . I think (in the future) they’ll continue along the same lines. . . . I have four kids; I have eleven grandchildren . . . so I think when I look at any philanthropic endeavors, I think I will, as time goes on here, look at family first and then possibly other areas of consideration.

Another premise of this study was that these student-athlete alumni would feel a closer connection to the team, their coach, and the athletic department, and thus, be less likely to support the institution overall. While there were some outliers, most participants did feel a stronger sense of obligation to their team and the athletic department, and would feel more compelled to give to athletics, or at least partially to athletics, because they were student-athletes.

When speaking about why he might donate to Theodore, Tom said:

I know that when I look at donating, or if I ever look at donating and kind of weigh things, I would consider checking the box and giving it to the athletic department. Trying
to direct it toward the athletic department rather than the general school fund when I would donate, because I know that the football program really could use more attention than maybe the general fund would need.

Jerry relayed similar feelings about the desire to give to athletics:

certainly, I have a far greater connection to the team and the basketball program than anything else at Theodore University, with the exception, maybe the fact that the actuarial science program, which I certainly recognize it, haven’t provided a lot of support for that. But nonetheless, the connection, certainly with the team and the actuarial program, and therefore, my career, is also probably pretty unique.

This desire to philosophically support the athletics department was not always materialized in the form of philanthropic gifts for several reasons. One reason for this, and another finding in the study, was a lack of knowledge of participants in this study about university budgets, their endowments, and an assumption that all universities have a lot of money. Similarly, there was a lack of knowledge among participants about where their donation money goes, especially if it is to a general college fund. This sentiment came out generally in two ways: first, a concern that college is too expensive and that universities should use donations and other sources of funds to keep the cost of tuition down. Second, a lack of urgency to give to higher education because these participants believe that universities already have enough money.

As Gary stated:

The cost of the education should not be going up higher than the cost of living should be going up. Yet, it’s not just Theodore. . . . There is so much money that is given to them, and yet the tuition continues to skyrocket. Something in there is not right. I don’t know where the money’s gone. . . . The money that’s being given doesn’t seem to really end up
helping the students, but somebody’s getting that money somewhere. I think that any of these alumni organizations, if they don’t wake up to that and give a better explanation . . . You know I’ve got two grandkids that are going to (another university), 75 grand a year for each of them. That’s ridiculous, but anyway, it’s just something doesn’t add up there. You don’t need to be a rocket scientist to realize that the cost of living is increasing at a certain rate, and the cost of education is increasing at a certain rate. And that cost of education is far, far exceeding the cost of living. So, it doesn’t exactly encourage anyone who’s paying attention to what’s going on to want to give to these universities.

Several participants indicated they would be unlikely to give to a general college fund because the cost of college was too expensive. There was a sentiment that colleges and universities already had significant financial resources and a confusing feeling of why it costs so much to go to college now. Not only had participants in this study never asked or been told about the university’s finances, but also, no participants in this study had been given information on what their general college annual fund donation would go to, and there was an assumption that a gift to a general college fund would just be lost among a sea of other donations—that there was a bottomless pit of unrestricted gift money coming into the university. According to Kristin:

our feeling is that there’s a lot of organizations out there that get no real funding. They get very little from the government; they get very little private, and $30,000 because that’s what we each give, can make a significant difference to their being able to help as many people as they possibly can. I guess when I look at Theodore, I think about all of these people who give and foundations and companies, and I think what significance will my $30,000 this year because….what significance does my $30,000 have to Theodore? Well, they probably get, in my view, and I don’t know if this is right, millions of dollars.
Students spend money, and companies give them money, and mine would make minimal impact on the overall bottom line. We’re trying to give to organizations that it does the greatest good and the biggest impact to their success.

This impression among participants that universities don’t need money relates to a similar finding among participants in this study of not knowing where money or donations go, how they are used, or if their donations have any benefits to Theodore. Kristin stated:

I don’t know why we give or don’t give to Theodore really except we feel, I guess, we had given a lot over four and five years and it’s never really . . . and I think because we feel it’s a small drop in the bucket. It’s not making a major difference. When we give, we totally give anonymously, so our name isn’t on anything. I think because we feel it’s not very significant to Theodore’s overall bottom line probably. And it’s probably not as helpful for them as it is for other small charities, for small organizations.

Patricia echoed these sentiments and said:

I would be more inclined to give to Theodore if I got a specific campaign to revamp the library, expand the . . . whatever it was. Versus just, “We would like some money.” And it might go into the general fund. I don’t think I’m unusual in that. I mean, in general, you think big university, tuition’s high, they’ve got a lot of money. What’s my $50 going to do?

Most alumni in this study preferred not to give to a general fund, not only for Theodore, but for any charity. Instead, participants gave several examples of how they had been approached by other nonprofit groups for a specific cause or fund, and they were much more likely to support this particular initiative. As Madeleine said, “When I don’t get to choose where it goes at Theodore, I don’t give. I don’t want to give to a general fund.” When discussing this,
most participants once again reiterated their desire to be approached for a specific request for a particular project, and general solicitations for the university overall had minimal impact on their desire to give.

For most participants, their philanthropic giving to other nonprofits and charities revolved around a great mission and a personal story. It was evident that Theodore fell short in this regard; for most participants, there is not a personal need to give, or a compelling story that alumni felt connected to like they may with other charities and nonprofits.

This led to another major finding in this study—the need for a compelling story of why to give back. This research study suggested a significant gap between a very fond affinity for Theodore from student-athlete alumni and then using that affinity to identify and effectively communicate why there is a specific need to support Theodore and Theodore athletics now. For participants in this study, there was a gap that existed between their affection for their alma mater and a compelling reason to give back. According to Michael:

my motivations in giving to most groups is the compelling story that they tell of why they are soliciting funds and what those funds will do. And whether they be youth organizations, whether they be specifically African-American organizations, whether they be art organizations, most philanthropists are looking for the arrow in the heart sort of story or communication that says, “Okay, I got to do this.” And I just believe when you’ve got a student-athlete who, most people who were student-athletes talk about how athletics impacted their life, whether it was the discipline that athletics gave you, or whether it was the self-motivation, or whatever verb or adjective you want to put on it. Athletics has an impact on athletes beyond the particular sport. And I just think that Theodore probably needs to learn how to tell that story.
Similar to the desire for a compelling story in their philanthropy, a related finding was that alumni in this study made their most significant donations or gifts when they were personally and individually asked to support a specific project, fund, program, or person. As Phil, said:

The couple of times that I’ve given to (Theodore), it was for specific causes or for specific people. So, one of the larger donations was for a student who was trying to raise money to put to something, a spring trip basically, so I just helped to support him directly . . . something very specific, maybe the football program and the football banquet, something in that range.

In response to his largest gift to Theodore, Bennett said, “I made (my largest) one-thousand-dollar gift because (the Dean) asked me.” In another example, when asked about giving habits to Theodore, Jerry said:

Yeah, it seems like (the total amount donated) seems low, ‘cause I’ve given . . . I mean, I know that the (Theodore Administrator) Fund was $1,000, and I know the (athletic) Club is usually $75, $125, $150 a year, so, that’s probably about right, ‘cause I have pretty much limited my giving to the (athletic) Club. And then, of course, with (Theodore Administrator’s) passing and development of a scholarship fund in his name, I gave more significantly to him, to that.

Because most participants indicated the desire to support specific individual or program, further interview questions asked these alumni about their connections and memories at Theodore. A related finding from this study was that most alumni had at least one robust connection at Theodore, usually with their athletic team or their academic program. When they had been approached to support their strongest connection(s) at Theodore in the past, they would
be more receptive to this type of donation, but it seems those specific requests were very rare if existent at all. This is one area of the research that needs further exploration and is discussed in Chapter 5: “Are other universities and college athletic departments able to devise fundraising plans to ask alumni on an individual level to support specific projects?”

When speaking about their connections to Theodore, and why they might be compelled to give, there was a strong sentiment toward their former coach, as well as faculty members who played a significant role in their personal development at Theodore. As Madeleine recalled:

Coach made it like a family, and he put the priority of the person above the priority of the athlete and bringing the money in. Yet, at the time, our team was the only kind of self-sufficient athletic team at Theodore.

Similarly, Bennett stated:

(this professor) was instrumental as a mentor and as a professor and he probably was the most influential, no question was the most influential career-wise and a lot of my other mentors and my coaches, cross-country running coach and assistant track coach (name) was really significant, a significant figure and there were other professors who had a great impact as well but everybody in the journalism school.

When asked about their connectivity to these individuals since graduating, it was decidedly less than they had perhaps hoped. For most participants in this study, there was a strong desire and inclination to support their former team. Even though these coaches and faculty members left lasting impressions on these alumni, many had not heard from them, had been asked to support something for them, or come to an event in their honor. Many alumni gave examples of coming back to a former coach’s funeral, and their coach being an amazing mentor during and after their time at Theodore. Yet, none of the participants in this study had
been asked to support a fund or other donation for their coach, and few had been asked to
support something specifically for their athletic team. Madeleine recalled:

I felt connected to the coach, and I felt connected to the team. If there was something
named for (the coach), and for him, it probably . . . I would give a lot more to that
particular thing, and I’m sure a bunch of other people would too. I mean when his
funeral came around, we drove . . . I drove 10 hours, so I could be there. And that’s the
way a lot of the team members were. He was amazing and very impactful. So, if
Theodore would tap into more of those things, is who really impacted the students or the
student-athletes, I think that it could be more . . . Financially, I guess is what they’re
looking for—financially beneficial for them.

This sentiment of wanting more of a personal connection to Theodore manifested itself
with former classmates as well. When these alumni participants remembered seeing one of their
classmates being honored, or otherwise involved with the university, they were more likely to
pay attention and be engaged in that activity. As Patricia indicated:

We gave on that All-In Day. And it actually turns out to be a great classmate of mine
was one of the people doing the matches and I’m still in contact with him. Several
people, through social media that day were kind of like, “If I were cool, I’d give in.” That
kind of . . . I think those kinds of things are actually beneficial. I felt as close to
Theodore in that couple weeks that I had in a while because I felt more of a personal
connection.

After finding that for many participants, Theodore lacked a compelling story to give, and
there was not a strong personal connection, interview questions were asked about how
participants viewed philanthropy with other non-profit organizations. When asked about how
their philanthropy is solicited by other groups, several participants indicated that other nonprofit organizations had made more compelling cases for support and this was a reason participants tended to give more to other charities and religious groups. As Michael stated:

the story, the why, the other organizations have a good why, why this is important and why you should give. Theodore’s story’s just not that compelling. It could be.

Sometimes, I’m just like, “This is kind of lazy. They could do better.” Just the overall ask could be better. Just the storytelling could be better, especially for an academic institution. I’m like, “Oh, they could do better than this.”

Further discussion on developing personal connections and creating compelling stories as a reason why student-athlete alumni make gifts will occur in chapter 5. Another finding to answer the first research question in this study is that the alumni’s proximity to the city that Theodore is located in plays an essential role in their connectivity and likelihood to be involved and give back to Theodore. Several participants had not been in the city since graduating, and when asked about their location and how that impacts their relationship with Theodore, many indicated a lack of connection, and a lack of obligation to give because they lived in other states. When asked about philanthropy with Theodore, Jerry stated:

Yeah, unfortunately, it’s pretty minor, as the dollar amounts represent. And to your previous question about, would it be different if I lived in (city), or (state), or whatever. Yeah, I would feel a closer connection, and obligation, I guess, and therefore, would be able to see how my time, energy, and money is being effectively used. If I’m not there to see it, it does impact your decisions and choices. So, unfortunately, I guess the direct response to that is that I may not probably subscribe to my philanthropic description very well, relevant to Theodore University. But again, I think for pretty good reasons as it
relates to my own, where I live and what my exposure has continued to be relative to Theodore.

Similarly, when asked if their proximity to Theodore had an influence on their connection and likelihood to give to Theodore, Jensen stated:

That’s a really thought-provoking question, because if you would’ve asked me that just sort of out of the blue, I would’ve said, “No,” but maybe it does, because I don’t see things that are happening on a day-to-day basis, right? I think, for myself, it’s easier for me to realize the influence that my giving might have if I’m seeing on a day-to-day basis what might be happening. And I know that’s part of the goals of outreach and stuff, but when you get a quarterly newsletter or a biannual email, you know, it’s probably not the same as being there, so in retrospect, I guess, yeah. That probably has had some influence on my giving to Theodore.”

When asked about the question of location related to their philanthropy, several reflected that it actually did make a difference that they were not as close. As Kristin stated:

You know, that’s actually a very interesting observation. I wouldn’t have really thought about that. You know, I would say to you if we lived in (city), we probably would be philanthropic to Theodore. Because my husband is very involved down at (another university) because he grew up (there) and we live not too far from there. Not that we give them money, but we give them time and other things. You know, maybe. If we lived in (city), I think we probably would be more philanthropic towards Theodore.

Conversely, those participants who did live near the school felt a stronger connection to Theodore, were more aware of what was going on with the campus and were giving more philanthropic gifts to Theodore. When discussing his career, and staying in the area, one
participant indicated that he or she still regularly met with former faculty on campus or at professional conferences. This relates to another finding that alumni in this study tended to give more to organizations that were closer to their home, and in their community. For some, this represented a chance to see their gifts materialize in a more personal way. As Abraham mentioned:

We give to a wide variety of different organizations: cancer research, my wife’s big into Planned Parenthood. Just to give you an idea of our family philosophy, we try to give as much to local organizations as we can. We want to try to help the people that we know, the people that we have a relationship with. . . . We try to do things locally.

For others in this study, this was a result of other nonprofit groups being able to make a personal connection and request of them since they lived in the same community and wanted to support local initiatives. Madeleine indicated:

I give to public radio . . . and the public library, things like that that I think are very useful, not just for me, but for a broader audience that multiple people can learn from. I donate probably about 5 to $6,000 a year to a children’s home for kids that have kind of fallen through the system, and that’s their last-ditch effort before they would be on the streets. So, I put the majority of my money there. For the public radio and public library, and those things, I want to give some to support so that it’s available for everybody to use. I know I’ve used them, so I want to give back to that.

This relates to most participants wanting to be able to see their gifts, especially their more significant donations, go to something that they can see the immediate, and personal impact with. Whether it was to their church, a local charity, or another nonprofit group the common theme with participants was that they wanted to have a personal connection to the things they
supported, and it was easier to do that with organizations close to where they lived. According to Patricia:

Most of my financial donations, I chose them based on where I can actually see a direct impact. You know like at my kids’ school, I donate, but I’ve endowed a certain, specific event thing that I know it’s going for. And then with these projects at the kids’ schools, it’s to buy an iPad for a certain teacher’s project that she’s doing. My foundation actually pays mortgage and rent and utilities for specific people that I work with social workers.

When analyzing the findings for the first research question, the answer can best be summarized as going from the general to the specific. Generally, the participants in this study wanted their university, and their athletic program to be better than it was when they were students. This primary tenant of not wanting their alma mater to be worse off generally warranted nominal giving, sometimes in exchange for tickets or other athletic benefits. There was not a sense of obligation to give, both from scholarship and non-scholarship student-athletes. The scholarship student-athletes in this study did feel a sense of indebtedness for their athletic and educational experiences at Theodore, but for some, this desire to give to the institution that gave them a scholarship was overridden by several things including lack of financial resources, lack of a specific request for specific project, lack of a personal connection for the request, lack of a connection at the university or in the athletic department, and more critical philanthropic interests and ideals. Most participants did feel a stronger sense of obligation to their team and to the athletic department and would feel more compelled to give to athletics, or at least partially to athletics, because they were student-athletes. This led to the specific—those participants who had a closer connection to the university and had been approached for a specific request to support Theodore were more likely to give, give more frequently, and give larger amounts.
Furthermore, those participants that lived close to the university felt more compelled to give philanthropic gifts.

**How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore?**

My second research question was: “How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore?” For most participants in this study, the answer was that their financial donations to Theodore were much less compared to other nonprofit organizations. The reasons for this phenomenon varied but was usually because the participant had other philanthropic priorities or felt that his or her philanthropic gifts to Theodore would not be as meaningful.

In this study, all participants were able to articulate what philanthropy meant to them, and the participants considered themselves to be philanthropic, at least with the organizations that were most close to them and their philanthropic interests, but many indicated they were not philanthropic with Theodore. When asked about his definition of philanthropy, Michael said:

A person that realizes that wherever they are in life, whatever level, whatever phase, that they didn’t get there by themselves, that it was someone else or some opportunity, or some organization that helped them get wherever they are. So, for example, the person that went to (my Theodore athletic coach) to ask him if he had one scholarship left, I’ll never forget him. And whatever they need, I try to help him. Because, as my mother said to me, “We don’t know what you would have been without a college education, but we know what you are with one.” So, I think a philanthropic person understands that life is bigger than themselves and that whatever level of whatever that they’re doing, that it was someone else, or something else, helped them achieve that.
Every participant had a different view and philosophy of what philanthropy was, and then their view of philanthropy related to their relationship with Theodore. When asked about why they gave to Theodore, an initial response for some might be to say thank you for the education and experience they received at Theodore. As Abraham stated:

We have a family foundation, and we have to give a certain amount of funds away every year. As a family, we sat down, and we tried to figure out who we’re going give it to and how we’re going to allocate our budget. (My wife) gives to (another university) and I give to Theodore, and we give to a lot of other charitable organizations. It’s not a lot of money, but it’s a little bit and just our way of saying thanks, basically.

This somewhat generic answer generally coincided with what the participant viewed as nominal donations to Theodore. Going back to the more intrinsic reason for why they gave, the participants usually went back to the personal philanthropies that were most meaningful to them.

Findings About Philanthropic Tendencies of Participants

One finding was that most participants chose to support other nonprofits or charities much more so than their support of Theodore. Their motivations for this were: these other groups needed the support more than Theodore, they could more easily see the benefits of their philanthropic gift with these organizations, these other charities were usually closer to them geographically, and the perceived need was higher with these other organizations. When asked about how they viewed their philanthropy with and toward Theodore, Jeff said:

Oh, different than I do a church or the Salvation Army. The church and Salvation Army, things like that, are . . . they’re all . . . I know Theodore’s a non-profit, but they’re . . . I consider them different than Theodore. They’re . . . The Salvation Army is needy.

Theodore’s not needy. I know they can use the money, but . . . Do you see the difference the way I . . . ? Theodore, I give to because I like Theodore. I graduated from Theodore.
I have a kinship with Theodore. My church is religious-oriented. Salvation Army is need-based.

The reasons that alumni chose to philanthropically support other non-profits more than Theodore varied. As Kristin said:

We support organizations like College Bound Opportunity where we mentor these kids and get from junior year of high school through college to make sure they have a good start in life and a college degree, and we give them a lot more money than we do Theodore. We give to a lot of other non-profit organizations, and we don’t really support Theodore, that’s the truth. . . . we could totally give Theodore money now, we just don’t, and I think it’s because we just don’t feel it would be significant to them.

When asked about their philanthropic priorities compared to their philanthropic giving to Theodore, many participants had strong personal connections to a variety of nonprofits that had a more profound personal impact on them, such as veterans’ organizations, cancer organizations and homeless shelters, among many other groups. For many participants, these organizations were viewed as a higher priority to support than Theodore. When asked about their philanthropic priorities and how they may relate to Theodore, Madeleine indicated:

I figure from here on out,. . . I think probably be about $150 a year (to Theodore), which is what it has been unless there’s something specifically for (the coach), and then I would give more. If there was a fund, you know, like if they did a scholarship fund, an endowment or whatever, in his honor, in his name that then went to a student-athlete, I would give more to that, to support that. Theodore isn’t where my passion lies. My passion lies with underprivileged kids.
Most participants indicated they supported a variety of charities at various levels, but overall, the largest organization they supported was their church or religious organization. As Gary indicated:

Yes, I do give. We are Christians, and we tithe 10% of our gross income. And that is given to a number of different missionaries and other Christian organizations. My wife and I are generous people; we give 10% of our gross to other people who are in need, who are involved in Christian organizations, who are involved in the church.

Sharing a similar sentiment, Arnold said:

We tithe to our church, and that’s because of our upbringing, what we learned basically from the church. Religious organizations, basically Fellowship of Christian Athletes and our church, are our main ones that we give the biggest percentage of our money to.

When asked about their financial ability to philanthropically support Theodore and other non-profs organizations, many participants indicated some capacity and financial resources to make donations to Theodore; and for all participants in this study, there was a strong inclination to support Theodore. Likewise, all participants in this study indicated a wonderful experience at Theodore, and a strong desire to see the university and athletic teams succeed. For many though, due to their other philanthropic priorities, Theodore was toward the bottom of the nonprofit groups they choose to support. As Jerry stated:

I might give 15 or $20,000 a year to various organizations. So, what I do for Theodore is unfortunately very minimal relative to them, but the others are probably nearer and dearer to my heart for lots of different reasons.

On a related note, Isaac recalled:
My support for Theodore is substantially lower. . . . We might give $2000 annually to different organizations. So, giving $200 (total lifetime donations to Theodore) . . . obviously, it’s lower probably on giving scales than maybe some other places.

When asked about where Theodore ranks in a list of organizations he supports, and why that is the case, Oliver stated:

The others are quite a bit more. I think we are like 5,500 or 6,000 a year is what we do in charitable giving and as you can see, Theodore is a small portion if not zero lately of that. I think it kind of goes back to the last question a little bit is the specific, well, I guess it’s a two part. So more than half of that goes to our church, and so it’s more of a religious belief obligation that we have there to kind of support that organization in our lives. And then a lot of the other stuff is to specific causes, whether that like I have some family members with MS and so we’ll donate to the MS, or I’ve had a best man in my wedding, his dad died of ALS and so we’ll definitely give to the ALS foundation, so kind of things that kind of hit closer to home or more specific causes that I’m close to. Yeah, we’re close to Theodore, but again, very few times has it been requested money for specific items, and when it was, like the (Theodore faculty person) Foundation, when that request came across, we were more willing to give for those.

Once participants were asked where Theodore ranked in the list of the organizations they supported with philanthropic gifts, most were surprised when they found out (by this self-reporting process) that Theodore was toward the bottom of that list, and for most, the participants in this study thought this realization was unfortunate, and for some, an enlightenment of not knowing why this may be the case. For most participants, this was the first time someone had asked them about why and how they chose to support Theodore and other nonprofit
organizations, and when most self-identified Theodore toward the bottom of that list, the initial reaction was surprise, and a feeling of not sure exactly why that was, other than they had just given to other organizations more prominently over the years.

Another related finding on how alumni view philanthropic giving to Theodore, was that most participants were not aware, and were surprised, by what donations they had given to Theodore. For most, they thought they had been giving more to Theodore than they had.

According to Jerry:

Yeah, it seems like it’s low, ‘cause I’ve given . . . I mean, I know that the (former Theodore administrator) Fund was $1,000, and gosh . . . I suppose it’s possible that it’s about right, ‘cause I know the (athletic) Club is usually $75, $125, $150 a year, so, that’s probably about right, ‘cause I have pretty much limited my giving to the (athletic) Club.

As Liz recalled:

I didn’t even have any idea how much I gave. I was kind of hoping it would be more than (this amount of money). That doesn’t seem like much, but I don’t know if it will change because it’s not the highest thing on my list as far as I feel like people in need need more basic things is higher. I try to give what I can.

When asked about why Theodore was at the bottom of their philanthropic priorities, and how these participants viewed their philanthropic giving with Theodore, alumni in this study had several responses, including:

• “Well, I guess before you told me it was only (this amount of money), I would have felt pretty good about it. In retrospect now, I guess, I graduated almost 20 years ago, probably should be more than that. So, maybe I haven’t given enough. But I do think that I have been philanthropic to the university, and as I said, I’m still involved both with
time with the College of Pharmacy and have given in the relatively recent past, to the university. I know it’s not, the goal of the conversation is not advancement, but certainly, as I’m reflecting back on this, I would say, yeah. I feel I’ve met some of what I’ve described as a philanthropic person to Theodore, and maybe I could have done some more. I can do some more in the future.”

- “I’m not sure why we, my husband and I, don’t give more to Theodore.”

- “I give to a lot of places, and I generally, probably Theodore has come out fifth or sixth on the list because I felt the other ones were probably more necessary for me to give to than Theodore.”

- “There’s no comparison. If you’re talking just from a percentage or amounts, I don’t give ‘til it hurts, I would say, but I give quite a bit to the particular, the local church and the church’s school—probably, I don’t know, 20 times what I’ve given them. So, each year, 20 to 30 times more than what I did for Theodore. So that’d be probably about right. So, 3000 to 4000 dollars a year to those organizations.”

- “I’ve got lots of personal interests and a lot of things that I’m involved with that I place just a higher priority on. And if I had lots of financial wherewithal, maybe I would feel differently, but there are, at some point, you have to kind of draw the line and say this is what money my philanthropic or charitable giving is going to be, and here’s what the priorities are.”

When these participants were further pressed about their overall philanthropic inclinations and reasons for giving donations or not, there was a strong sense of which group, organization, or person needed it the most. According to Kristin,
There’s a lot of organizations out there that get no real funding. They get very little from the government; they get very little private, and $30,000 because that’s what we each give can make a significant difference to their being able to help as many people as they possibly can.

Related to this finding, Dustin stated:

Could I do more? Well, if I took away from something else, but I feel that I need to give the Salvation Army 25 bucks at Christmas time ‘cause it does help people in our community. I need to go out and help the Boy Scouts ‘cause they need it. There’s all these different things that I’m thinking probably if I was living in (town), I may have done more things with Theodore than I’m doing now.

On a similar note Patricia indicated:

It’s not as appealing to me to write a check and just mail it off and not know what Theodore’s doing with it. I’ve chosen (to give) where I personally see that there’s a need that is . . . that’s impactful to me, that I can either make a difference and or that I truly believe in the mission of what they’re doing.

When analyzing these findings for the second research question there were some parallels to the findings in the first research question. Specifically, that alumni in this study felt that Theodore did not need their philanthropic gifts, and other non-profit organizations had a better story of why they needed their support.

A separate unique finding on how alumni view their philanthropy with Theodore was a minority sentiment among participants that perhaps a reason for the lack of communication from Theodore, or lack of recognition from Theodore, was because they were not giving enough
monetary donations. One participant recalled an event where he went to meet basketball coaches at an alumni event, and the coaches did not stop by the table to see this alum. In Arnold’s view:

(The coaches) identify those (alumni) that have money. . . . those ones that got money they’re the ones that are, “How are we doing, coach? How are things going? How are we going to be? I got this guy over here.” You know?

Conversely, some participants believed their communication had changed with Theodore since they started giving donations. As Brooks mentioned:

I would say, since I became a donor that my communication has changed. Other than $100 here and there, I think when (Theodore staff member) reached out to me, we had lunch and talked to me about doing an annual pledge in person, from that moment on, I’ve been giving every year.

Some participants believed that because their donations might be relatively small, they may not be getting the personal communication or recognition that they might expect. For participants in this study who had been consistent donors to Theodore for many years, there was a mindset of what can Theodore do for me now, which relates to SET. One example of this was in athletic ticket benefits (more on this later in this chapter). For those participants who indicated they had limited discretionary funds (for example a fixed income in retirement), there was a desire for Theodore to recognize their lifetime giving and lifetime contributions to Theodore. This finding on communication and recognition from Theodore as it relates to alumni’s philanthropy with the university will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Another separate finding related to how alumni view philanthropy with Theodore is that, for many alumni giving of their time is just as important as giving a monetary donation, even though some participants admitted not having time to volunteer. For the organizations that
participants supported the most, it was a combination of service, time, and giving monetary gifts. Most participants did not view themselves as philanthropists who only write checks, at least for more significant amounts. As Kristin stated:

we feel that time is just as good as dollars because we wanted to make sure we weren’t always just the check-writing people. We really had skin in the game of our own heart and soul and not just our dollars.

When asked about his philanthropy with Theodore, Isaac stated:

You know, I think from a monetary view, probably not a lot at this point. I’ve given the time for different things for the PharmD program or going to speak at Theodore for different things. And so, I feel like I probably give there a little more at this point, than I have monetarily. I don’t know if there’s a reason why, but certainly they’ve asked for time. We’re probably more giving of those things right now.

Further discussion on the ability and desire of Theodore to philanthropically engage their alumni with their time and service will be discussed in chapter 5.

Another distinct finding related to how alumni view their philanthropy with Theodore was that some participants who did give support to Theodore were bothered by, and were not sure why, other alumni choosing not to give back to Theodore. As Jeff stated:

Most alumni are not (philanthropic with Theodore). I worked with two Theodore graduates, and I was able to see their records as part of (a fundraising effort), and neither one of them have ever given to Theodore. And I’d asked them, and they go, “Oh, no. We’re not giving.” They have no connection with Theodore.
This finding is similar to that of Tesar (2018), which found that alumni think that people better off than they are, other alumni, are already giving, or perhaps the university has enough money. So, they do not feel compelled to give.

Similarly, some participants thought that people were just not philanthropic or giving much to other groups at all. Interestingly, this sentiment was never a self-diagnosis. Even though many participants admitted to not being philanthropic with Theodore, all participants indicated that they were philanthropic, using their own definition of the term, but with other nonprofits groups, churches, or charities.

**Findings Related to Student-Athletes**

One premise for this study was that alumni may have thought they already gave the university their time and talents as student-athletes, thus, they did not feel compelled or inclined to give monetary donations as alumni. This proved to be untrue in this study, even though some alumni expressed that they gave Theodore a great deal; they devoted most of their time practicing, performing, and traveling to represent Theodore at the NCAA Division I collegiate level. The participants in this study did not believe they should not give to Theodore because of their student-athlete service; there was not a feeling of having already paid it forward with time and service to Theodore. Instead, participants were grateful for the opportunity to represent Theodore as student-athletes, and for those who had an athletic scholarship, they were grateful for the financial aid they received to compete. Madeleine, a participant who had a full-ride athletic scholarship said:

I did give a lot, but Theodore gave me a lot. So, I believe that while I competed year-round, and while we had a series of rules that we had to follow, and while I was still carrying a full load all the way through, I felt that that . . . they gave a lot to me, but I could see how I gave a lot to them.
Another scholarship recipient, Jerry, described the experience:

I was blessed with the skills and the ability to play basketball. I was given the opportunity to do it. I got a ton out of it. I mean, my life at Theodore was totally different than if I hadn’t been part of the basketball program, I think…I didn’t view it, I don’t view it today as having given up a lot of time, sweat, and blood, and so on, that that was my payback, if you will. It was just terribly rewarding from a lot of respects, and what I got from the coaching staff and the individuals on the team, to me, it was priceless, and it was well worth the time I spent practicing and away from other things at Theodore University that I might have otherwise experienced, and I certainly don’t view it as, “Gee, I don’t owe them anything, ‘cause I already paid it.” That just isn’t a philosophy that I would subscribe to at all.

As described in Chapter 2, O’Neil and Schenke’s (2007) suggested that athlete alumni do not give as generously as they could to their alma maters. Their quantitative study set out to examine how former student-athletes of one institution in the southwest felt about their alma mater, specifically as it related to their philanthropic contributions to their institution. Based on other empirical studies, the authors hypothesized that alumni who were student-athletes felt less compelled to give donations to their alma mater because they had already given enough to their schools and may have felt more loyalty to the sports team than the institution itself. The findings from this study indicated that there was no sentiment that these alumni had already given to the university through their time, talents, and service as student-athletes. Instead, participants reflected that they were given the opportunity to compete at a high collegiate level, and while they worked very hard for Theodore, this was an amazing opportunity for them as well, and the fact that they had an athletic scholarship as student-athletes would not negate their giving to
Theodore now as alumni. I discuss this finding later in the chapter, as it relates to SET and other related findings.

When asked about the correlation between receiving an athletic scholarship and the desire to give back to the university as an alumni, most participants indicated that their desire to give was there, but for some, this desire to give to the institution that gave them a scholarship was surpassed by several things including lack of financial resources, lack of a specific ask for a specific project, lack of a personal connection for the ask, lack of a connection at the university or in the athletic department, and more critical philanthropic interests and ideals.

When analyzing the question, “How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore?” the answer was that their financial donations to Theodore were much less compared to other nonprofit organizations. The reasons for this phenomenon varied but was usually because the participant had other philanthropic priorities or felt that his or her philanthropic gifts to Theodore would not be as meaningful.

**What are their motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?**

My third research question was: “What are student-athlete alumni motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?” The answer to this can best be summarized around personalization. Those participants who had strong motivations to give back also felt a strong connection to their team, a coach, a faculty member, academic department, or athletic department. Those participants who were not motivated to give back to Theodore had little personal connection to the university now; they either lived far away from the university or had not been in touch with a university official, athletic or otherwise, in a number of years.

When first asked about their motivations to give, or not give, to Theodore, the overarching theme was they wanted to give to Theodore because they had a great experience there, and they wanted Theodore to be successful in the future. Those who gave a version of this
answer tended to give back more nominal amounts while those who were giving more mentioned their involvement and connectivity to the institution. Jeff, an alumnus who donates to the university mentioned:

I’ve been involved with Theodore since I graduated. I’m on the Alumni Committee, I’ve been on the President’s Board, I have athletic club (membership), I have been involved in reunions for undergrad and law school, I’ve done fundraising for the law school and for the business school. So, I’ve maintained involvement with Theodore since I graduated . . . so I guess I give to Theodore because I appreciated what Theodore did for me, and I like Theodore, and I’ve been involved with them.

Another related finding was a strong sense among participants that they were very grateful to Theodore for their professional success and for the opportunities awarded to them if they had an athletic scholarship during their time as student-athletes. All participants were grateful for their athletic scholarship, and everything that came with their scholarship as it related to their overall student experience.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a philanthropic gap was identified—the gap between alumni participants’ desire to support Theodore; their inclination for wanting Theodore to be a successful academic and athletic university, and (for many participants) their lack of financial donations; there were several findings on why this phenomenon existed. One finding was the lack of information given to the alumni about why something was needed and a lack of a compelling story to give back to Theodore. Several participants indicated that they had never been approached by Theodore in a meaningful way for an opportunity to donate to a specific project; there was very little connectivity between them and to the ask. According to Michael, who had a full-ride athletic scholarship:
I think (giving) should be based on the solicitation. I think it should be based on the ask, and what the giving is for, and how it is approached. I really believe that there’s an opportunity to do better. So, for example, I’m sure in records there that people knew I went to Theodore, basically free. I think that that should be sort of a separate type of solicitation, because if you went to school for free, I think those of us are a little more empathetic to give back, all right? And I think that communication should be a little more tailored to those type of individuals. I think that should probably more a personal, intimate sort of invitation and solicitation to those particular athletes. I also think that you should also look at those graduates who have been athletes and have done extremely well in their careers. That should probably be a different level and different type of solicitation. No one has sort of, over a period of time, come and sat down and say, “Can we put a giving program together,” like a lot of other organizations who solicit me. So, I really just think that athletes should give back, but I think the ask and the solicitation should be a little more personal.

This desire for a personal or specific solicitation was a recurring pattern, as both something lacking in their desire to support Theodore and what other nonprofit organizations were doing well. The student-athlete alumni in this study indicated that their motivations to give, and their likelihood to give, varied from cause to cause and from solicitation to solicitation. While many gave relatively smaller amounts to the general Theodore fund, or to one of the athletic giving clubs, most participants felt more compelled to give to a specific solicitation that had more personal meaning to them. As Madeleine stated:

For Theodore, I want to support the lending library and things like that within the athletic department, but there’s not a lot of selections. If Theodore would send me something,
and said, could you do a monthly thing? We’ll stop harassing you, and wasting our
money in the mail, and you can check this, and it’ll be a monthly thing, and you can
choose where it goes, and I could write in that it goes to the lending library for the books
for the student-athletes; then, I would give more.

In another example, Kristin indicated:

I mean if somebody called me and said they were working on a very specific small
project that interests myself or my husband or either of us, we would probably become
involved with that. But it would have to be something that was small scale where we felt
we could really help that in the process….If the (Theodore) volleyball team or some team
told me they were doing some kind of a project like a philanthropic project or some sort
of community-wide project, and they were looking for $5000 to do it, I would probably
say to my husband, “Oh my gosh, look at this thing I just got. We can actually sponsor
this entire event, and it wouldn’t have happened if we didn’t participate.”

This sentiment of wanting a more personal solicitation as a motivation to give, or not
give, to Theodore, led to further inquiries into how these alumni preferred to be solicited.
Several participants indicated that they easily tuned out solicitations that came over email,
telephone, or in the mail. As Kristin confessed, “The students call; we don’t answer the phone.
I’m gonna be honest with you; we do not answer the phone.” Another participant, Arnold,
lamented, “once you get on the list, you get requests from everybody. Every day, we throw
away four or five letters that we don’t even open because all they want is our money. We can’t
give our money to everybody.” The use of email for solicitations was not viewed as a better
alternative either. One alumnus, Brooks, mentioned:
One of my problems with email and letters is, in my position, I just get inundated with
that stuff. I really appreciated that (a Theodore staff member) reached out to me back six,
seven years ago, and took time to (personally meet) . . . but that didn’t happen for the
longest time after I graduated. It’s pretty easy for me to dismiss an email. Because I get
so many of them, they’re just clutter.

Because mail, telephone calls, and email solicitations did not seem to be desired or
preferred, the question was asked of the participants about how they would prefer to be solicited
for donations. While a few alumni indicated that getting a letter in the mail was sufficient, most
indicated their desire for a personal request from the athletic department or their academic unit.
As Michael indicated:

I would say as a student-athlete, you kind of feel a little closer if the athletic department
reaches out to you, you think the track coach or the track team reaches out, you feel a
little more inclined to do it because they’re hitting a deeper heart valve with that sort of
solicitation.

This concept of having coaches or faculty make requests for gifts was reviewed with a
Theodore administrator for added context in this study. According to a senior administrator at
Theodore (personal communication, 2019), there have been a number of special funds to
recognize or honor faculty and coaches over the years, but it is rare for coaches or faculty to
make personal solicitations; instead, Theodore administrators have leveraged coaches and faculty
when fundraising staff members ask for donations by using their namesakes and including
descriptions of them in written solicitations.

Similar to wanting a solicitation to come from an athletics administrator, coach or
faculty, another sentiment among participants was shared about the desire to have current
student-athletes as a part of the solicitation process. When asked about their giving to Theodore, Phil said:

Maybe a little bit guilty. I got a lot from Theodore. Certainly, I paid for it, monetarily. I think that if I had a closer connection to some of the folks there, if I still had a connection to Dr. Meredith or Dr. Rogers . . . My giving to the football program actually was a connection, I knew the student-athlete personally, and that’s what urged me to pick the phone up. I knew the call was coming; I knew who was calling. That’s what motivated me to pick the phone up and not let it go to voicemail, so to speak. So . . . I think that’s the piece that’s probably missing, is that connection. It’s kind of faded.

Once again, there was a sense among many participants of loyalty to their team and related desire to support future members of the team. Specifically, there was an inclination from some alumni to support the team if current student-athletes were the ones asking for donations. As Gary indicated:

I would think in particular to want to help other student-athletes that were doing what you were doing because I’ll guarantee ya, those student-athletes, while a lot of the other kids going to college are sort of partying or having a good time and so forth, if you’re gonna compete at the college level you’re working your tail off. I mean, you’re really putting in a lot of time. So, I would think that sentiment would go toward wanting to help others who are in a same situation that you were in. They’d want the graduating athletes to turn around and try to help out the athletes that are currently there in school.

The use of current student-athletes as a part of the solicitation process will be further discussed in chapter 5.
Findings on Gift Solicitations for Theodore

When asked about the solicitations they receive from the university, there was a mixed response from participants on whether the solicitations came from the university, the athletic department, or both. Most participants recalled solicitations from the Athletic Club, which are athletic department solicitations, other participants thought the majority of the solicitations were from current students who were calling for the annual fund, and others remembered most solicitations coming from the university in the mail. Often, these solicitations were not in line with what the alumni’s philanthropic interests may be. For example, one participant mentioned only receiving solicitations from the athletic department, even though he would have preferred to see specific asks from the university.

When asked why Rick gave support to Theodore athletics, even though he felt more of a tie to the university overall, he indicated, “I got things in the mail, occasionally, from time to time. And I’ve sent small token amounts of money because I did appreciate what Theodore did (for me as a scholarship student-athlete).” This particular participant gave several examples of longing to have a more meaningful and personal connection to the university but, for many years, has only received mail solicitations from the athletic department.

Corresponding with the finding of participants seeking a more personalized request or solicitation, there was a similar finding that very few solicitations came directly from their team or coach. Most participants indicated that they would prefer a personal notice from their team to support current student-athletes on the team, but very few could recall any solicitations like this. While many remembered getting general athletic department solicitations for the Athletic Club, these were often viewed as areas where they would send a very small gift, generally to get some sort of ticket benefit. When speaking with an administrator at Theodore (personal communication, 2019), it was mentioned that the time and effort to conduct individual
solicitations and communications for all athletic teams was an expensive and time-consuming task that had not been pursued in depth.

There was also a mixed response on how many solicitations participants received each year from Theodore, and through which mediums these solicitations were received. Most said that they would guess they received between four to six solicitations each year, and this was from both the university and the athletic department. On the high end, some participants indicated they may receive up to 12 solicitations each year. Most participants indicated receiving letters in the mail most often, followed by telephone calls asking for money, and then personal solicitations or requests over social media. This was very inconsistent though—some only recalled getting letters in the mail while some only remembered getting phone calls. It was also inconsistent if these solicitations were from Theodore or the athletic department. Some participants remembered only getting solicitations from the athletic department, and some only remembered getting solicitations from the university. When asked about what type of solicitations these participants preferred, it was also a mixed response. Some indicated only getting a letter in the mail, some preferred to get a reminder to give through a telephone call, but the majority indicated the desire for a more personal outreach and personal request. When comparing the amount given to Theodore to the ways these participants preferred to be solicited, it was evident that individuals who preferred a letter in the mail or a simple request generally gave less than individuals who would prefer a personal request or personal outreach. This finding was in line with where Theodore was on these participants’ philanthropic interests. Most participants mentioned giving small amounts of money to a variety of other nonprofit groups or charities indicating that they could easily give $50 or $100 to something that was not as
personally meaningful to them, but they would need a more personal connection to give more of their time, talents, or monetary support.

Another finding was that many alumni recalled specific individuals, coaches and faculty, who left a lasting positive impression on them. Among the many coaches and faculty who were named, there was one individual who consistently came up as a positive example of university connections and communication, Tom Smith (a pseudonym being used to protect anonymity). According to the vice-president of university advancement at Theodore (personal communication, 2019), Tom was a fixture at Theodore from the 1930s until 2018 in the athletic department. Throughout this study, Mr. Tom often was mentioned as the one individual who attempted to connect and reconnect all former student-athletes back to the university. Both in the form of written newsletters and personal communication, Tom seemed to be someone who all participants could agree on as a person who was impactful to them and who kept them connected to the university and the athletic department. As Arnold reflected:

    Tom kept all the athletes up to date on what . . . The athletes would send information in, “I just had a baby” or, “Somebody passed away.” He kept all of that, and it would go out, I think twice a year. That will never go out again. There will never be another Tom, and there will never be anybody that will go to the detail that he did to keep the alumni involved as far as athletics. That’s a sad thing that’s going to happen at Theodore University.

Rick also shared wanting more personalized communications from Theodore:

    Certainly, under Tom, some of the little things he did from time to time with continuing to put out a newsletter, just incidental information about people you knew or had a relationship to. I think in the best sense those undergraduate years are powerful,
personally, and always leave residual elements, and those are things that could be
exploited in a positive way in Theodore’s interest.

As Dustin recounted:

Tom called me because he knew from (the golf team) that I was from (this city), and he
wanted me to be an in-between between Theodore and a family (from there). I got to
know him pretty well through that. Through the years, you’d see him on campus. He
knew you, and we had a number of times I stopped in and talked to him. We became
really good friends. We had been donating to his scholarship fund.

Further discussion on communication from Theodore as a motivation to give will be
discussed later in this chapter.

A separate finding on motivations to give, or not give, to Theodore are related to the
individual financial and personal situation of each participant. For instance, the timing of when
the alumni were receiving a request was important in their decision whether to give. Several
participants indicated a desire and inclination to give, but given other financial priorities and
budget commitments, they had limited capacity to give at that time. As Arnold put it:

The one thing that’s difficult is that, once you retire, Theodore still pushes you to give
more and give more money, and that’s hard to do when you’re down to Social Security
and diapers, and you don’t have the income that you had when you were working full-
time. We’ve managed to give what we consider to be a substantial amount of money to
keep Theodore going. We would get a letter, “You’re only $250 short. Can you come up
with that amount of money?” It’s just kind of funny how they would do that.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study specifically excluded student-athlete alumni who
had graduated fewer than 10 years ago, as it was assumed that those younger alumni would still
be working to accumulate discretionary funds, and would not have as many financial resources to donate to the university. The lack of financial resources was still a common reason participants gave for not making donations to Theodore in this study. An intriguing discovery in this study was that for participants who indicated they did not have significant resources there was a sense from these participants that if they were not able to give donations they wanted to be upfront about that during the interview questions for this study, perhaps to rationalize the gap between their inclination to support Theodore and their capacity to give. The other thought-provoking finding among those who indicated that they did not have the financial resources to give was there was always a correlated sentiment of their desire to give more if they had more resources available. As Chad stated:

I wish I could give more. I just have never been in the financial position to really give what I think Theodore deserves. I like Theodore a lot more than I can give to Theodore, which, that’s just the way it is. But hopefully, as I get a little older and things fall into place more, hopefully, for me, I’ll be able to give more. I do give a little bit to other places and things, but for me personally, man, if I could, I would love to have my name on a building or something. To me, that’s the coolest thing in the world, to say, “This is the Whatever Center” or even just a lobby or even a scholarship. I think it’d be really cool someday if I could ever afford it. I’ve done a lot of other things for Theodore. I volunteer some, and I serve on the national advisory council. I’m going to be on a panel for new students and parents coming in, to talk about Theodore and I’ll be greeting them at the basketball game and things like that. So, as much as I can and as much as my travel will allow, I try to do things like that too. Monetarily, I wish I could do a lot more.

In a similar vein, Bennett said:
The financial realities of the fact are that I have four young children which are a big factor and I gotta figure out how to pay for college for them, so there’s that. . . . Yeah, it’s really a case of I feel very strongly about Theodore and want to help them in any way that I can. Financially, I’m not in the situation that I would like to be as far as being able to support them, but I do need to. . . . It’s not for lack of desire.

When talking about what he or she can give to Theodore each year Liz said:

I would say just for my recollection, I give more to the (athletic) scholarship fund just because I was an athlete and I was very grateful that they helped support me. Especially basketball, for them to have to put me in (the team). So, that was huge for me. And I do remember a year or two where someone that was just asking for money for Theodore had called me and I had already given like $100 to (athletic) scholarship fund. Like I can’t afford to give both. There have been times where I just give to one or the other, and it’s usually whoever called me first.

Conversely, there were participants in this study who indicated that they had the financial capacity to make larger donations to Theodore, but there was a lack of inclination. For example, some participants indicated giving substantial donations to other nonprofits, having a charitable trust or family foundation, or an annual pool of discretionary funds to give away to charities each year. Ironically, for most of these individuals, their philanthropic priorities lay elsewhere, or they were not aware of a need to give to Theodore. As Kristin stated:

We have our own family foundation. And our feeling is that there’s a lot of organizations out there that get no real funding. They get very little from the government; they get very little private, and $30,000 because that’s what we each give, can make a significant difference to their being able to help as many people as they possibly can. I guess when I
look at Theodore, I think about all of these people who give and foundations and companies, and I think what significance will my $30,000 this year because actually, we’re giving our money this week, what significance does my $30,000 have to Theodore? Well, they probably get, in my view and I don’t know if this is right, millions of dollars. Students spend money, and companies give them money, and mine would make very little impact on the overall bottom line. We’re trying to give to organizations that it does the greatest good and the biggest impact to their success.

This finding is similar to earlier findings of a perceived need to give more to other non-profit organizations, and that Theodore does not need philanthropic gifts in the same way that other groups do. In a similar vein, Patricia stated:

I run a foundation now that raises money for colon cancer patients in my husband’s name, and that’s really the charity that I’ve chosen to put my financial donations to. So that’s where my focus has been. I’ve chosen to lend my support to things that are personally close and important to me. I’ve established a foundation, and I personally donate to it—not only my time but money. I support a national organization also that fight’s colorectal cancer, and I volunteer my time for that, attending area events on their behalf and then advocating for them here.

For other participants, their approach to giving philanthropic gifts simply did not align with Theodore’s mission, even if they had a very positive experience as a student-athlete. When talking about one participants’ philanthropic tendencies, George said:

I tune (solicitations) out, not because of Theodore, like you heard me say my experience at Theodore was very favorable, but everything that I do is through Christian components. For example, our family’s very philanthropic, but it’s all through Christian
ministries. The high school I went to, for example, is a Christian high school. It’s one of the partners in the refugee ministry. One of the tenants that we look at, “Is it a Christian outreach that’s going to be oriented towards something that’s fulfilling the gospel?” If the answer to that is no, then I don’t give anything. So, because Theodore is a secular college, it’s not something that I would end up giving money to for a donation, and it has nothing to do with my experience there because, like I said, my experience was favorable.

Related to the financial ability of participants to give, or not give, donations to Theodore, a thought-provoking finding was that among individuals who indicated that they grew up in a low-income family or that they were the first in their family to go to college, there was an increased appreciation for the opportunity to go to college and to be a college student-athlete more than those participants who did not have those upbringings. Similarly, those participants from more humble backgrounds were generally more philanthropic, both to Theodore and with other nonprofit organizations. Some of these alumni indicated a heightened sense of obligation to support Theodore because of the experience they had, and others referenced growing up in a family that emphasized the importance of philanthropy.

Another related finding was the disparity in what each participant viewed as significant monetary donations to Theodore and to other nonprofit organizations. For example, some alumni believed that a $20 donation was a very meaningful gift, whereas other participants indicated that they somewhat routinely gave $50 or $100 donations to a variety of groups and they did not think much of it. Some participants expressed a giving level threshold—a dollar amount (e.g., under $500) where they felt comfortable giving out donations without much thought, and on the other side of that, there was a dollar amount (e.g., $1,000+) where they had
to put more thought into what they felt comfortable in giving. Some participants indicated consulting with their spouse or significant other in these decisions, others indicated what they gave to Theodore, and to other nonprofit groups, was solely their decision. Not surprisingly, those who only gave small donations, or no donations, were also those alumni who indicated a lack of financial resources as one of their motivations not to give to Theodore.

A similar finding on their motivations to give revolved around the spouse or partner of the alumnus. As indicated previously, 33% of participants were married or in a partnership with another Theodore alumni. When asked about how this dynamic impacted their connectivity and propensity to give to Theodore, most participants indicated that it was a positive attribute, as their spouses or partners also had a good experience at Theodore, and this added to their affinity for their university. Patricia, who was married to a Theodore alumnus said, “I could see us increasing it just because now I’m also married to a Theodore alumni. And we’ve talked about it more.”

**Findings Related to Communication from Theodore to Student-athlete Alumni**

The research questions for this study: “Why do Theodore University alumni who played a varsity sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore?” “How do Theodore University alumni who played a varsity sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore?” and “What are their motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?” revolve around alumni philanthropy with their alma mater, but there was also a need to ask questions about communication from the university to the alumni, and their communication to Theodore. This line of questioning seemed essential—if an alumnus is not being communicated to, or not communicating with the university, there is less likelihood that he or she would feel inclined to make monetary donations to Theodore.
Among participants in this study, there was a theme of lack of communication from Theodore to these alumni, especially early on after their time at Theodore. One alumnus, Rick, stated:

I don’t think Theodore did a good job of following up with me as an alumnus. I fell into the category, I think, of being the military officer, and that wasn’t of special interest to Theodore at the time. . . . For a period when I was (in a specific city), I would get together at least annually, and I’d always try to make those (alumni events) in one location or another. But that seems to have gone by the wayside. Maybe I’ve just fallen off of a list because I’m not a serious enough donor.

Most participants indicated they had received at least some form of information in the form of newsletters, emails, or telephone calls, but this was very inconsistent, and there was a lack of personal communication in most cases. Several alumni indicated that there would be sporadic gaps of several years where they would not hear, via mail, telephone, email, or personal visit, from Theodore. As Brooks lamented:

There was a real period in there where I didn’t hear anything. I went quite a few years without ever even being contacted outside of my own contacts with Theodore. I would probably say the one thing is that Theodore needs to do a better job is connecting with the alumni . . . probably my first 10, 15 years out of school . . . I don’t know if I just wasn’t on their radar, or if I hadn’t sent in an update with my address . . . I don’t know if it was my fault, but for 10 or 15 years, I didn’t really hear anything. They’ve gotten a lot better over the last 10 or so.

This lack of communication, in some cases, resulted in lost opportunities for Theodore to capitalize on philanthropic gifts. As Michael said:
Theodore was a great experience. I made great friends there. I had a great education; I had great life experiences. I’ve got some lifelong friends who are Theodore graduates. I have friends and relatives who went to Theodore. Matter of fact, I’ve given some of those friends’ kids the money that I probably would have given Theodore if there was a better process in communication. So, what I would say is, I don’t think, probably I’m the only one who feels like this, and I just think, from an academic standpoint, they can do better on their communication in solicitation for people to donate to Theodore. . . . For example, I went to one event they had in (a city), and I committed to giving back my scholarship, the four-year scholarship money. And Theodore never followed up.

This lack of communication resulting in the lack of financial donations ranged from potential large gifts as Michael recounted to smaller annual fund gifts as well. As Matt recalled:

There’s some unresponsiveness at the (athletic) club level there, and all I wanted . . . I was willing to give more than twice as much than I normally give, but nobody’s answered any of my calls, so I’m not doing anything right now. When somebody finally calls me back, I might give something, but I’m not doing anything right now because I keep getting letters from the university about this $50, and I’m not sure what’s going on with the (athletic) club because nobody answers my call.

Some participants did admit that this lack of communication could be partially their fault, as they may not have told the university about their updated contact information. When asked, participants indicated that this lack of communication was generally from both the university as a whole and the athletic department. This gap in communication was inconsistent in what the participants desired in their relationship with Theodore, which were more personal interactions, and for a personal, consistent, connection with the university, especially related to ways that
alumni could give back to the university or how the university could capitalize on the strengths of their alumni.

Many participants in this study attended other higher education institutions other than Theodore; thus, a comparative model exists in how universities communicate, connect, utilize, and solicit their alumni. For most participants in this study, they were more motivated to give to Theodore than other universities they attended for graduate school, but some alumni stated that other universities had more effective communication and solicitation outreach. As Phil said:

So, I’ve gone to three other institutions for master’s degrees and probably have just as similar ties to some of the professors and I don’t feel motivated at all to donate to them. So, when I get the stuff from Theodore, I at least read it and try to follow what’s going on with the programming. I am interested in what’s going on; I do follow things. I do get the pangs to do it occasionally, but for whatever reason, I don’t follow through. I think it’s just that lack of a close connection.

Rick commented on the lack of communication from Theodore by saying:

I hear most often from (another university), but that’s probably because I was academically more involved with the (other university). And I hear probably after that most from (another university). Theodore has been episodic. In recent years, they’ve done more, and I’ve been tempted to go to some of the programs that they have here in (his home city), but they haven’t had anything that I’ve been notified of for quite some time.

For most participants who referenced receiving solicitations from other universities, they thought that their desire to support Theodore was more than their other alma maters, but these other universities reached out to them more frequently and consistently than Theodore. This lack
of communication tied into a recurring theme among participants for a desire to have a more personal communication and connection with the university, and the athletics staff. This finding is in line with why many participants chose to come to Theodore. In addition to coming for their sport or academic program, most participants indicated that they liked the size of Theodore, a smaller institution, where they could develop meaningful personal relationships with their faculty and friends. What these alumni view as their connection to their alma mater now is the same as their student experience—an opportunity for an intimate personal connection to collaborate on meaningful projects with university and athletic department administrators. As Brooks said:

I think I owe an awful lot of who I am today from my time at Theodore. I didn’t realize how good my education was until I got out and started competing with my peers in areas. I literally felt like I was three to five years ahead of everybody else I came in contact with. I just really felt that, while Theodore’s a reasonably expensive private school, I think it’s worth every penny. I take a lot of pride in it. That’s why I want to give back as an alumni, is to perpetuate that for the future. It’s really cool to see Theodore do good things. . . . What I enjoy about the Theodore experience is. . . . Maybe we don’t have the national exposure that (another university) gets, but what I like is, I walk into (the athletic center), and the athletic director says hi, shakes my hand. It’s a little more small plate. It’s a way more intimate relationship than what you get at (other universities). I just want to see that perpetuated. I just think it’s a unique experience that Theodore offers in the community, period. That’s why I give, and I think others should.

This desire for a close and personal relationship with Theodore administrators and coaches was also viewed as a reason their connection was not as strong as it could be. When asked about why a participant gave philanthropic support to athletics, Arnold said:
We like the coaches. We don’t know them all, but we know the women’s coaches a lot. We know just a couple of the football staff. Men’s staff we don’t know. . . . I introduced myself to the head coach the other night, but he’s more interested in the money people. . . . The ones he’s seeing are the ones that got money. We were at (a restaurant), a big deal they were having. Not one coach came around and shook our hand.

Arnold’s comments were similarly echoed by most participants in this study. There was a strong sentiment among participants of wanting a personal connection, and the ability to have a personal conversation with senior athletic and university administrators such as coaches, deans, the athletic director, and the university president. Findings from this research aligned with a study (Givertz & Segrin, 2005) on personal commitments in close relationships, where the authors found:

personal commitment is not merely a reflection of how satisfied an individual is with his or her relationship. Naturally, increased feelings of satisfaction with a relationship may lead an individual to develop strong feelings of personal commitment for that relationship, which may, in turn, result in engaging in behaviors and cognitions, which lead to the development of constraints (i.e., increased investments, derogation of alternatives, social pressures, and difficulties in dissolving). (p. 771)

There was also a desire among most participants to be able to have access to, a relationship with, and the ability to discuss the future successes and opportunities of the athletic department and university with the most senior leadership of the university, most notably the head coaches, the athletic director and the university president.

One reason for this desire was because for the majority of participants in the study, their affiliation and allegiance to their team, the athletic department overall, and their former coaches
was extremely impactful and meaningful to them, even decades after graduation. It was this sense of team and comradery from the athletic department that stuck with them over the years and was at their top-of-mind awareness when reflecting on Theodore overall. This affinity for the athletic department materialized when discussing their motivations to give to Theodore. Michael recounted how his time in athletics at Theodore had a profound impact on his life, saying:

most people who were student-athletes talked about how athletics impacted their life, whether it was the discipline that athletics gave you, or whether it was the self-motivation, or whatever verb or adjective you want to put on it. Athletics has an impact on athletes beyond the particular sport.

When asked about his motivations to give to Theodore, Chad stated:

Because if I can contribute to these kids on the court today, I still see myself in them. I know what it’s like to win. I know what it’s like to suffer a horrible defeat. I know what it’s like on the long bus rides. I know what it’s like to get yelled at by a coach. I know what it’s like on a Friday after a game, at a party. I’ve been there. I’ve experienced that.

One of the reasons I love giving to Theodore is because I do believe, for the most part, that they are really invested in student-athletes. I just like the fact that Theodore represents something that I think is important in athletics.

Arnold put it differently, indicating:

We just give what we give and whatever they are asking . . . Education, for one, they just built a new building and everything. They were asking for that. Ours has been focused basically on the athletic club and football. Mainly because that’s how I got through
Theodore was because of my scholarship, and so I try to give back to that area. . . .

Athletics is mainly our giving point.

This sentiment was true regardless of whether the alumni were in a non-scholarship sport, or if they were a star in a very high-profile sport—there was a strong sense of loyalty and dedication to the team. Regardless of their sport, or their athletic scholarship status, the desire to support Theodore was there, but that inclination did not always manifest itself into monetary donations. For those participants in this study who were non-scholarship athletes, walk-ons, or only participated on their athletic team for a short period (less than two years) they were not as connected to Theodore through their athletic team, and their desire to give back, precisely because of athletics, was significantly less. For one alumnus, Patricia, who came to Theodore to compete in a sport, but ended up only competing for a year, there was a sense that athletics was not as meaningful as it was when she came to Theodore:

I enjoyed being just a student, as opposed to a student-athlete. I felt it overwhelmed my time at Theodore that year that I didn’t get to enjoy a lot of the things that I would have liked to have done as just a student. Which is part of what led me to not doing it the next year.

Conversely, those alumni who participated in scholarship sports and played on their team for all four years had a much stronger connection to the team and desire to support athletics. As Jerry stated:

the connection with the team, the connection with the basketball program, I guess it has a lot to do with how successful we were. I mean, to get to the Final Four and almost being the national champion. It keeps us connected in a way we probably otherwise wouldn’t have been, and certainly to Theodore University that we wouldn’t have otherwise been
. . . (I want to give) to recognize that you want the value of Theodore University academically, and the basketball program specifically, to continue to have value, and therefore, the importance of my supporting it. Now, that having been said, as I say, when I look back and look at the very little support that I provide to it, it doesn’t very well support that argument. But, nonetheless, it’s how I feel, my action, I guess, is something else.

As mentioned earlier, another finding on why participants were motivated to give to Theodore was for athletic office benefits. Many participants in this study were only giving donations to the athletic department to receive athletic tickets or other athletic benefits. Here are selected quotes from different participants about why they gave to Theodore (including the athletic clubs) in relation to an athletic ticket, pass, or seat benefit:

- “That probably wasn’t the main consideration, but it’s one of the benefits I receive. To be honest, we have season tickets to (another university) football, and because of the new tax laws, we can’t use any part of that donation, and I’m sure Theodore is the same way if you get tickets for it, so we still give, although we lost that access to that. You’re right. That’s not the main reason we give, but we certainly take advantage of it because it is available to us.”

- “In my very small financial contributions, Theodore is probably number one overall, and mainly that comes in the form of basketball season tickets. To me, that’s me contributing. I know that’s not necessarily a charitable contribution, but when I get my basketball tickets . . .”
• “Well, my motivation in giving when we were living in (town) was to get that athletic pass so I could go to the games. . . . You got an athletic pass, so I went to football games, I went to basketball and basketball games for years.”

• “Yeah, and I definitely get stuff from the (athletic) Club, inviting me to become a member. A lot of the benefits of that are season tickets or tickets to events which, unfortunately as an out-of-towner aren’t relevant to me.”

• “Yeah. I do the (athletic) Club every year. I come back for Theodore (track and field events) every year and get together with my old teammates and go to the races. With the (athletic) Club, you get free tickets to Theodore (track and field events), so all of us do that.”

• “Primarily we give to the (athletic) Club because otherwise, you can’t get good seats.”

• “Now that we don’t give enough money, we’ll probably get dumped out of there when they have realignment of seats.”

For many alumni, this was their sole motivation to give to a particular solicitation from Theodore—so they could get tickets, preferred seating, or other benefits related to sporting events. This desire to want something from their donations is discussed further in the implications section. Related to this finding, some alumni were not aware of the new tax law change that restricts what benefits universities can distribute and still count the donation as a philanthropic gift. This is discussed more in Chapter 5.

**Recognition of Alumni related to their Motivations to Give**

In their article, *The Effects of Recognition and Group Need on Volunteerism: A Social Norm Perspective*, authors Fisher and Ackerman (1998) examined how individuals want and have a desire to be recognized when they volunteer. This study also found that individuals want
to be recognized and feel a sense of worth with their alma mater. There was a strong sense of missing recognition and opportunities for Theodore to honor alumni from many participants.

One example came from Matt who recalled the university’s processes to honor student-athlete alumni:

Right now, the only way somebody gets to be a (alumni award winner) is if somebody else, usually from their era, recommends them. . . . In any case, what I think you need to do is something to recognize more people with the hope that then they’ll give more because I think the average person would if they were recognized. Right now, I’ll use me as an example; I don’t feel special. If I had an award, it would bring me closer to Theodore. I’m not saying we should give them away. That’s not what I’m saying at all. What I’m saying is I think you guys need to sit down and figure out a better strategy for recognizing people that really have done something, because I think you’re missing the boat on a lot of them just because nobody has brought it up to you. There’s a lot of people out there. I think if you did something different like that, you’d bring in some dollars.

This sentiment of wanting Theodore to engage them in their professional work or accomplishments related to the degree in which alumni felt connected to the university, and their propensity to support their alma mater. For some participants, this manifested itself in a series of why questions during the study: “Why didn’t Theodore ask me to do this?” “Why didn’t Theodore ask me to speak?” “Why didn’t Theodore invite me to this?” For example, Michael said:

I wrote a book, and I talked about . . . The reason I wrote this book is sort of, as I say in speeches is, I want to pay a debt that I know can never be paid, and that’s to all the
people who saw something in me before I saw it in myself. So, I wrote this book; it mentions Theodore. It mentions the experience that I told you. And I had a publicist who was trying to work with Theodore to have me do a book signing at Theodore and come back, which I had made up my mind, if they do this, I would, number one, give the books away. I wouldn’t sell the books. And number two, I’d write them a check versus them writing me a check. I was just never was able to get it done.

Similarly, participants mentioned a lack of awareness of alumni who served in the military. According to Rick:

I remember the first time I volunteered to go up to Denver to speak to a group of alumni and visitors, and people were struck and amazed that I was a full-time faculty person from the Air Force Academy. And I thought, “Boy, it’s interesting. I’ve been at the Air Force Academy all these years. Nobody (from Theodore) has ever knocked on my door.”

This alumnus continued:

I have, to some degree, a sense of what, from the fundraising and support dimension, would have been something of a missed opportunity for Theodore. If they had had more of an interest in working out of the . . . let’s say those graduates of Theodore who became military. Seeing to it that we met each other as Theodore graduates. . . . Those things happen as a result of direct personal relations and dimensions of things that. . . . If there were Theodore functions annually or more frequently, I’d at least have a chance to share some of this with maybe other Theodore graduates. . . . It’s to me just sort of a sense of maybe some missed opportunities. And I don’t hold that against anybody. . . . But that’s not ever been of any particular interest to Theodore, as far as I can tell. I just don’t fit the profile, I guess, of the kind of person that’s a stalwart supporter. And the personal
dimension of support that is volunteering for different things just hasn’t emerged out of what I feel my expertise or capabilities are.

In addition to recognition opportunities, several participants wished Theodore had approached them more about helping with student initiatives, including internship placements, career guidance, or classroom lectures. As Michael stated:

I have my own foundation. It’s an internship foundation for students of color who are looking to get into the field of communication. And we have solicited Theodore to get students to enroll, and I think maybe I have, over 15 years, have had maybe 3 or 4 Theodore students to even apply. And we place these kids at ESPN, or CNN, or BET, or MTV, or ad agencies or PR firms, so it’s (frustrating).

Similarly, Madeleine indicated:

I contacted the pharmacy school about ways to give back, to come in and work with them. This is what I do with the (another university) system. This is what I did at the (other university) system. This is what I do with (another university). I’d be willing to come in. Most of my lectures for all of those are voluntary lectures, and I’d be willing to come in and do that for Theodore as well. And they’re like, “No, we’re fine. We’re good.” And they’ve always had that kind of elitist attitude in my mind in their pharmacy school, which . . . I don’t know. That’s something that’s always kind of turned me off.

As indicated earlier, while there was not a finding in this study that alumni felt like they had already given their gift to their alma mater by virtue of their participation on their athletic team, there was a sentiment that these student-athletes worked very hard; traveling, practicing, performing for Theodore, and they gave a lot to Theodore. Alumni in this study shared that they
did not think they were owed anything because of their athletic service, but they should be recognized for their efforts, both as current students and as alumni.

When asked about the recognition and support of student-athletes, Franklin said:

I just feel very strongly that student-athletes are misrepresented. They say, “Oh, you’re so lucky. You got a full scholarship.” Well, yeah, you try to take a trip to Arizona on Tuesday and then go to Oklahoma on Friday and read 16 chapters in order to take a test on Monday.

This feeling of giving a lot to the university as a student-athlete from these participants also revealed sentiments of wanting to support current student-athletes because of the knowledge of how much of a commitment there is in being a student-athlete. As Gary said:

I would want to help other student-athletes that were doing what I was doing because I’ll guarantee ya, those student-athletes while a lot of the other kids going to college or sort of partying or having a good time and so forth, if you’re gonna compete at the college level, you’re working your tail off. I mean, you’re really putting in a lot of time. So, I would think that sentiment would go towards wanting to help others who are in a same situation that I was in.

**Findings Related to SET**

Related to participant’s motivations to give, the components of SET, were identifiable. As previously noted, Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) defined SET as a series of interactions that generate obligations. Within SET, these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (p. 874). One of the basic tenets of SET is that relationships evolve into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments. These tenants of SET were seen throughout this study, for example, in a “this for that” mentality related to their charitable giving for some participants.
When discussing a desire to be “treated right” by Theodore, in relation to getting athletic tickets, and a desire to have a personal connection with the coaches and athletic staff, Arnold said:

We’ve given close to $40,000, I think, and for two school teachers raising two kids and putting them through school that’s a pretty good chunk of money. It’s kind of like what can you do for me now? We’ll get seating. . . . What we can give now, not what we’ve gave in the past. I mean, $42,000 is a pretty good chunk of money. Now, that’s not going to be anything . . . I mean, we’re not going to be able to give that kind of money from now on. That’s what can you do for me now? That’s the way our society is. This alumnus continued later, “If things go wrong at Theodore and we’re not treated right, like on tickets, my philanthropy goes down. That doesn’t happen that often, but it does happen, and I usually let them know about it.”

This study was designed around SET and the assumption that a series of interactions (with Theodore University) generate obligations (to give monetary donations). As stated earlier, Mathur (1996) examined SET in the context of motivations for gift giving to charitable organizations. Mathur used SET as a framework for identifying rewards that older adults seek through giving. Mathur suggested that SET is especially suitable for this purpose because charitable contributions may be motivated by self-interest, altruism, or agnostic reasons, among other things. Among the implications that Mathur suggested for nonprofit organizations based on his research were:

- to establish long-term relationships with their donors. The solution to motivating donors may be to get to know them very well to the extent that they can be sent real personal
letters. Another implication for nonprofit organizations is that they may offer greater control to their donors over how their contribution will be used. (p. 119)

SET relates to the earlier finding that the student-athlete alumni in this study thought that they had not already “paid it forward” to Theodore by giving their time, talents, and service as student-athletes. Once again, when analyzing the results of the scholarship student-athletes in this study, an interesting finding related to the tenants of SET is among those participants who had a full-ride scholarship to play their sport at Theodore. When reviewing the literature discussed in Chapter 2 about why individuals choose to be philanthropic, there was an assumption that those alumni who had a full-ride scholarship might feel more obligated to give back to their alma mater to pay back the scholarship. When asked about their feelings of giving back to Theodore because of the athletic scholarship they received, several participants who had an athletic scholarship did not feel compelled to give back for that reason alone. This was different from the findings from a spring 2018 study on full-ride academic scholarship recipients (Tesar, 2018). In this study, some participants indicated that after graduation there was an initial guilt factor to give back, but over time, that feeling subsided, sometimes due to other higher philanthropic priorities, where the alumni thought their donation could have the most impact or their loss of a connection to Theodore. When asked if the fact that they were on a full-ride scholarship and if that has an influence on their propensity, or desire, to support Theodore, Madeleine stated:

Well, it can have a guilt factor with it, but really once I started . . . Got myself to a spot where I started giving; it was more based on where I felt I could be the most help and have the most impact.
Other participants felt more indebted for their athletic scholarship and wanted to give back because of the opportunity they received. When asked about his desire to give to Theodore because of his full-ride athletic scholarship, Jack said:

My experience at Theodore was great, and I think we talked about it a little bit earlier. Having the scholarship, along with having it, it was a wonderful social time at Theodore, and the scholarship had a huge impact on my giving to Theodore. The goal is always to give back. My goal is to give back more than what I received, and hopefully, my wife and I are going to be able to do that, but yeah, that had a huge impact.

The findings from this study added to the existing literature on SET by proving that interactions, such as philanthropic giving, are interdependent and contingent on the actions of other persons. This study showed that in the solicitations and communications received by participants from Theodore that alumni were or were not motivated to give philanthropic gifts. Furthermore, the SET tenet of relationship building resulting in mutual commitments was also validated in this study as all participants indicated that their relationship with Theodore also dictated their desire and propensity to give philanthropic gifts to the university.

**Findings Related to Experiences at Theodore**

Some participants went into great detail about very negative or very positive experiences that had a profound impact on their personal and professional lives. For those who had a significant negative experience (e.g., their sport being discontinued, or not being able to graduate as planned) while at Theodore, there was a sense of urgency to tell their story, and most often by the time the interview was complete, a sense of relief that they were able to verbally articulate some emotions and beliefs that had perhaps been bottled up for decades. For the participants who had a traumatic experience as students, the interview typically started off with negative
tones about their opinion about Theodore, but by the end of the conversation, most alumni
exuded a more pleasant demeanor and were more positive about their engagement as alumni.

Similarly, several participants in this study had examples of somewhat negative
experiences post-graduation, either where Theodore did not follow through on something, or
there was an opportunity lost, and this incident stuck with them over the years. Again, though,
 once these alumni had a chance to talk about what had happened, most participants had exuded a
more visceral positive connection to Theodore. After airing their grievances, most participants
were open to future solicitations if there was an appropriate request. There were exceptions to
this, some participants, for different reasons, decided that they would never give to Theodore
because of either a negative experience they had with the institution or their personal
philanthropic beliefs. Even for these alumni who will never give to Theodore, there was still a
sense of Theodore did a lot for them, and they overall had very fond memories of their
experience there and were thankful for their time and the education they received at Theodore.

As mentioned earlier, some participants had a specific negative experience while
attending Theodore that impacted their affinity for the institution and, in some cases, impacted
their propensity to be philanthropic with Theodore. In this study, these examples were isolated,
and as mentioned earlier, most participants felt relieved to talk about what had happened, which
in many cases was decades ago. When asked about their concerns for Theodore now as alumni
the examples that were mentioned most often were the lack of success in the athletic teams, the
shrinking enrollment, and specific issues the past few years on campus related to diversity or
staff firings. For some participants, these concerns were enough to curtail their desire to give
back to Theodore, but for most, these concerns were minor and did not overrule their desire to
support Theodore.
Findings Related to Connections at Theodore

With one exception, all participants thought extremely highly of the academic degree they received and the professional preparation that had during their time at Theodore. For some alumni, the experiences they had with their faculty, and the connections they had to their academic major department related to their professional industry was still their strongest affinity with and toward Theodore. For those participants who did not compete on their athletic team during their entire career at Theodore, their philanthropic inclination tended to be more toward their former academic school or college. As Isaac stated:

I actually tended to put anything given to Pharmacy (school) . . . and I think my wife would be more Education (school) because that’s where we obviously got our degrees in those colleges. So, I think we’re more likely to give to those particular areas of the school, versus Theodore as a whole—or athletics for me—not a big pull to donate to athletics by any means. Pharmacy school’s what sort of gives me my ability to give today. So, I look back at that versus more of the athletics side of things.

This finding was in line with some participants wanting to give to their academic college or school, and not just Theodore overall. As Bennett said:

I’m also just grateful for having the opportunity to participate in those sports, and that experience as a college athlete was really important to my overall college experience, so I feel grateful to the school for giving me that opportunity not like it makes me feel even more indebted I guess. I haven’t contributed much to the athletic program because I’m probably much more indebted to the journalism school for my career. I do feel indebted to the school and the journalism department in that way for sure.

Going back to earlier findings, once again, for those participants who competed on their team for the majority of their time at Theodore, they still recognized the value of their academic degree,
but most of these alumni were still more philanthropically inclined to support the athletic department.

Directly and indirectly, participants in this study reiterated that they had a very positive academic experience (with one exception) and used their Theodore degree to springboard into their profession and careers. As Jack stated:

My work life didn’t follow my Theodore study at all, but I did have the degree, and the image and the name of Theodore University has a large influence on employers. It’s a pretty prestigious university in the local area and nationwide. . . . I’m sure just having a degree from Theodore helped a lot in my work life.

Overall though, similar to the fondness these alumni felt for their athletic teams, there was a gap in their affinity for their academic degree and their inclination to give philanthropic gifts to Theodore.

Another interesting finding was the connection alumni had between their experience at Theodore and their desire to give was their time spent on the physical campus. There were a few participants in this study who even though they were participating in an athletic team, lived off campus. These alumni who lived off campus expressed weaker connections to the institution overall compared to those who lived on campus for the majority of their tenure.

When asked if their philanthropic giving to Theodore would change in the future, it was a mixed result. For those alumni who did not plan to change their giving to Theodore in the future, some participants indicated limited financial resources such as being on a fixed income in retirement while others indicated that they had other philanthropic priorities. Other alumni indicated that they hoped that they would give more in the future. Some had already been thinking about how they could give more to Theodore in the future; others commented that
participating in this study was going to make them think about their philanthropy with Theodore, and others hoped that they would have more financial resources to give to Theodore in the future.

Another unintended finding from this study was that most participants were pleased to talk about this topic of philanthropy and their memories of Theodore, both good and bad. For many participants, this study provided an opportunity for them to express views about their philanthropy, their time at Theodore, and their path after graduation that no one had ever asked them about before. One alumnus recounted feeling very disillusioned after Theodore cut his sport, and he had not had the chance to talk about what had happened for over 20 years. As Franklin said:

Yeah, pretty much the first time (I’ve talked about this). I’ve had some ups and downs but talking about what happened there in those four years, it just kind of drug out too. . . . It’s not like I don’t talk about Theodore or that I don’t know about Theodore. It’s just I had the beef. I had it. . . . I’m glad I had a chance to just tell the story. I really do appreciate it.

Jensen also commented on the ability to discuss his philanthropy:

(doing this interview) is certainly going to have some influence on me in sort of reflecting on what I’ve given in the past, and what I’ll give in the future. I know that’s not the goal, but it’s going to have some unintended consequences.

Most alumni were thankful to participate in this study, as they very rarely got to talk about their philanthropy and student experiences. For most, it was a unique opportunity to verbally express emotions that had been bottled up for perhaps many years, as well as a chance
to talk about their philanthropy, which they might have never talked about before. As Gary commented:

I’m really glad you’re doing this, and I hope that there is some good feedback to the university that makes sense. So, I just thank you for giving me an opportunity to express, you know, what I think and feel on this because you know you sort of feel like nobody really cares. And I appreciate the opportunity that you’ve given me to at least express my thoughts on it.

Summary of Findings

When reviewing my first research question: “Why do Theodore University alumni who played a sport choose to either give, or not give, philanthropic gifts to Theodore?”, the answer can best be summarized as going from the general to the specific. Generally, the participants in this study wanted their university, and their athletic program to be better than it was when they were students. This primary tenant of not wanting their alma mater to be worse off generally warranted nominal giving, sometimes in exchange for tickets or other athletic benefits. There was not a sense of obligation to give, both from scholarship and non-scholarship student-athletes. The scholarship student-athletes in this study did feel a sense of indebtedness for their athletic and educational experiences at Theodore, but for some, this desire to give to the institution that gave them a scholarship was overridden by several things including lack of financial resources, lack of a specific request for specific project, lack of a personal connection for the request, lack of a connection at the university or in the athletic department, and more critical philanthropic interests and ideals. Most participants did feel a stronger sense of obligation to their team and to the athletic department and would feel more compelled to give to athletics, or at least partially to athletics, because they were student-athletes. This led to the specific—those participants who
had a closer connection to the university and had been approached for a specific request to support Theodore were more likely to give, give more frequently, and give larger amounts.

My second research question was: “How do Theodore University alumni who played a sport view philanthropic giving to Theodore?” For most participants in this study, the answer was that their financial donations to Theodore were much less compared to other nonprofit organizations. The reasons for this phenomenon varied but was usually because the participant had other philanthropic priorities or felt that his or her philanthropic gifts to Theodore would not be as meaningful.

My third research question was: “What are student-athlete alumni motivations to either give, or not give back, to Theodore?” The answer to this can best be summarized around personalization. Those participants who had strong motivations to give back also felt a strong connection to their team, a coach, a faculty member, academic department, or athletic department. Those participants who were not motivated to give back to Theodore had little personal connection to the university now; they either lived far away from the university or had not been in touch with a university official, athletic or otherwise, in a number of years. To answer the research questions for this study better, the findings discussed in this chapter are expanded on in the discussion and implications chapter.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Connections to the Literature

Findings from this study mirrored results from previous studies that were highlighted in the literature review. Related to communication, this study also found, similar to Quigley, Bingham, and Murray (2002), that the more frequent contact an alumnus has with the institution, the more likely they are to make a donation; and corresponding to Shapiro (2010) most alumni felt that there was a deficiency in the way the university communicated to them, particularly about the donation process.

In this study, the location of the alumni was linked to their likelihood to make a donation, as was previously found in the studies conducted by Holmes (2009), Weerts & Ronca (2008) and Marr (2005). The greatest probability of a philanthropic gift came from those that lived in the same community as the institution, which was also found by Nesbit, Christensen, Tschirhart, Clerking, and Paarlberg (2015). Also similar to the findings in this 2015 study was the conclusion that giving is more likely to occur if the donor is directly involved with the activity.

Another similarity in the findings was the need for alumni to see the outcome of their giving, as previously discovered by Weerts & Ronca (2009), and that the university needs to connect the philanthropic interests of the donors to the current needs of the institution, and provide the compelling reason why those funds are needed, similar to what was mentioned by Terry & Macy (2007). This gap in philanthropy – between the fondness the alumni expressed for their alma mater and the ignorance on the importance of donations was also identified by Shapiro (2010).

In regards to SET, the findings from this study both paralleled other studies, as well as presented new data into the theory. Similar to Weerts & Ronca (2008), this study also found that
there may be an innate reciprocity in SET alumni may feel in response to the benefits of being exposed to the athletic program at Theodore as reason to give back to the institution. There was a difference in the findings of SET compared to O’Neil and Schenke’s (2007) study. Related to SET O’Neil and Schenke (2007) hypothesized that alumni who were student-athletes felt less compelled to give donations to their alma mater because they had already given enough to their schools and may have felt more loyalty to the sports team than the institution itself. The findings from this study indicated that there was no sentiment that these alumni had already given to the university through their time, talents, and service as student-athletes. Instead, participants reflected that they were given the opportunity to compete at a high collegiate level, and while they worked very hard for Theodore, this was an amazing opportunity for them as well, and the fact that they had an athletic scholarship as student-athletes would not negate their giving to Theodore now as alumni.

**Implications for Practitioners**

As mentioned throughout Chapter 4, most participants in this study longed for a more personal relationship with their alma mater along with a desire to have a more intimate connection with university personnel including coaches, athletic administrators, and the university president. The implication from this finding for universities is: “How do you consistently connect, engage, recognize, and solicit alumni who are spread out across the world?” Looking at this case study example, there were over 74,000 alumni (with living alumni ranging from graduation years in the 1930s to just last year), and almost 7,000 student-athlete alumni of Theodore who lived across the country and the world. According to a senior administrator at Theodore (personal communication, 2019), there were approximately 30 staff members across the university and athletic department whose primary work responsibilities included reaching out to and connecting with alumni. This ratio of university staff to alumni
may be a challenging situation on how to sustain a personal communication model or be able to recognize alumni achievements consistently and engage in personalized solicitations.

Perhaps the first place to look for solutions is how alumni were communicated with after graduation. As referenced by participants in this study, many indicated sporadic communication with Theodore, and over time, a loss of connection to their alma mater, even though these alumni had very engaged and rich experiences as student-athletes. When asked about examples of how this lack of communication and connection to Theodore manifested itself over the years, several alumni indicated that they had not told Theodore where they live, what they are doing, or given their updated contact information, which may have made it difficult for the institution to communicate and engage with them. According to this administrator at Theodore (personal communication, 2019), Theodore alumni and athletic staff try to keep alumni records up to date through mailings, telephone calls, and information on their website, but their success in getting updated contact information is only effective if the alumni take the time to respond and update their information—there is no service or staff person at Theodore who automatically updates alumni contact information.

Another implication for university officials was how they recognized their alumni, both informally and through formal recognition programs. As mentioned in the findings, many participants wished Theodore had recognized their achievements, asked them to be engaged with current students, or asked them to speak on a subject of their expertise. Another university administrator indicated (personal communication, 2019) that Theodore did try to encourage alumni to be engaged with their alma mater by speaking in classes, lecturing on campus, or mentoring students, among other things, but there was often a lack of university resources and student and faculty time to have meaningful engagement opportunities on campus or at a
regional university event. Furthermore, this university administrator stated that there were alumni award programs, both for the university overall, as well as the athletic department specifically. This administrator said some of these alumni award programs had been established for a number of years, but the university was always looking at ways to recognize and promote their alumni’s accomplishments. One potential hurdle with this for the university might be available time and resources of staff to not only to be able to connect with alumni in a meaningful way, but also have the appropriate campus opportunities available that match an alumni’s expertise, and fit in with the schedules of the university’s students, faculty, and coaches.

Another implication of this study was from the finding that these alumni needed a compelling story concerning why they should give to Theodore. Participants in this study had transformational and rich experiences at Theodore, both as student-athletes and in their academic programs. That wonderful experience as students was not enough for most alumni to be compelled to give significant donations to Theodore. In accordance with SET, these participants did not feel a sense of obligation to give just because of their time spent at Theodore and as student-athletes. Instead, participants needed a specific why. Why should they give to Theodore? Some participants could recount when they were moved to give based on a particular solicitation, but most alumni in this study had not been told a compelling story concerning why their donation would make a difference.

A problem for universities and their athletic departments is how this need for compelling development stories can be articulated individually to thousands of alumni? According to the CASE (2019), universities have utilized other alumni, videos, their website, social media, and current students, as ways to tell their story, and then make a compelling philanthropic request.
As indicated by participants in this study, these mass communication mediums may not be enough to deliver a compelling message effectively. At least in this case study, it may be difficult for the small number of fundraising staff members at the university to be able to connect with the thousands of alumni to deliver a personally compelling story for their university. This phenomenon of not enough university personnel available to deliver a compelling individual story of why donations are needed is an area of research that needs to be further explored and tested by practitioners in the field.

A related complication is whether it is the job responsibility and if there is time, for coaches, faculty, and current students to make personal requests for donations from alumni. The findings from this study indicated a strong desire from alumni to have a personal connection and relationship with university administrators, particularly coaches, faculty, current students, and senior administrators. If there are not enough university fundraisers to be able to make personal connections with alumni or if alumni are more likely to positively respond to a meeting with a coach, faculty, student or administrator; there will have to be an assessment and evaluation on what these other university constituents can and should do in relation to alumni relations and fundraising. Further research is needed on this topic to identify best practices in using these other stakeholders, alongside the university fundraising staff, when soliciting for philanthropic gifts from alumni. Thus, the ramification for practitioners from this study is how do universities devote enough resources to developing personal relationships with their alumni.

When looking at the alumni relations and communications findings from this study, there were several fascinating findings. First, most alumni in this study were unaware of how the university uses its donations, how the university’s budget works, where the university has revenue and expenditures, and what the endowment does and does not do for the university.
Alumni could not see the cause and effect related to their giving and advancing the institution—they wanted Theodore to be better, but they may not have seen their contribution as being a direct link. The assumption in this finding was that alumni would like to know more of this information and that it would make a difference in their giving to the institution.

According to a senior administrator at Theodore (personal communication, 2019), there are some select alumni who are privy to the university’s inner-workings, including its financials, but these alumni are those serving on a university board or committee. According to this administrator (personal communication, 2019), the vast majority of alumni do not get specific information on how the university’s budget was derived and how its endowment is used. A different Theodore administrator indicated (personal communication, 2019) that for some solicitations there was information included on exactly what the funds would be used for, but for more general solicitations there was not always specific information on what the funds would be used for since general unrestricted gifts can be used for many different operational needs of the university. An implication and area of further research needed for practitioners is how universities communicate information about their budget, revenues, endowment, and use of donations to their alumni base.

Similar to not knowing where donation money always goes, most participants in this study were not aware of all the donations they had made to the university and to the athletic department. As indicated in the findings, most alumni were surprised to learn what they had donated to the university, and for most participants, there was a sense that they had donated more since they graduated. One implication from this finding would be for university officials to print lifetime giving amounts on the solicitations that alumni receive or to otherwise publicize lifetime giving from alumni with their consent.
Additionally, most participants in this study were not aware of the different ways to support the university, both the institution overall and the athletic department. Going back to earlier findings, alumni in this study expressed a desire for a specific project to support and a personal request to support it. An implication was that there is a challenge for universities on how to let their alumni know about the myriad of different funds, projects, and programs available to support with their philanthropy, as well as how to identify and solicit thousands of alumni for potentially hundreds of different projects to financially support, such as scholarships, research, athletic teams, and capital projects as just a few examples.

Several participants in this study shared detailed examples of both very positive and very negative experiences that happened to them during their time at Theodore. For some alumni, these dramatic events dictated, to some extent, their propensity and desire to give philanthropic gifts to Theodore, both positively and negatively. In either context, the participants in this study were most grateful for the opportunity just to be heard. For many alumni, there were vivid stories and intense emotions that they had wanted to express and verbalize for decades but had not had the opportunity to do so. Whether they felt compelled to support Theodore financially as student-athlete alumni, they were at least thankful that the university (through this study) would listen and ask questions about their Theodore story. The implication in this finding was how universities find an opportunity and platform for alumni to verbalize their frustrations, concerns, or joyful memories to a person at the institution in a meaningful way. This finding implied that university officials could develop a stronger bond with their alumni if they provided a platform for them to discuss their feelings candidly.

There were also several other implications from this study related to the personal nature, philanthropic inclinations, and altruism of the participants. Some studies have been conducted
on why a college education is impactful, for many reasons, for individuals who were raised in a lower socioeconomic class, or if they were first-generation college students. In one study (Morales, 2012), research showed how these particular students’ higher education experiences had a profound sense of freedom and liberation from emotional/psychological issues and ideological/political constraints. In concurrence with Morales’ research, this study found that individuals who were raised in a lower socioeconomic class, or if they were a first-generation college student, they recognized the value and appreciated their college degree, thus, related to this study, and were more inclined to support their alma mater as alumni. An implication for university fundraising staff would be to target alumni with these unique backgrounds (if they were known) as a way to be more effective in their ability to connect with alumni who want to give back to the university.

Another implication for practitioners from this study was the connection alumni had between their experience at Theodore and their desire to give was their time spent on the physical campus. There were a few participants in this study who lived off campus even though they were participating in an athletic team. These alumni who lived off campus expressed weaker connections to the institution overall compared to those who lived on campus for the majority of their tenure. According to a recent Inside Higher Education article (Lederman & Lieberman, 2019), more students choose to complete higher education online or are commuting from home. This is an implication for future research—the potential negative impact on alumni connectivity to the institution overall if one is a distance student, and then the propensity to give monetary donations as an alum. This is an area of research that needs more investigation, as it has the potential to be very harmful to university advancement and fundraising initiatives in the future.
Implications for Policymakers

As indicated in the findings, several participants stated that their desire to give a monetary gift to Theodore was because of athletic benefits they received in return, including athletic tickets. In 2017, the federal government changed the way that universities, and other nonprofit institutions, can give items or services in exchange for a philanthropic gift. Under previous tax laws, it was permissible in some cases to offer athletic ticket benefits and still count the donation as a philanthropic gift that could be written off for tax purposes by the donor.

According to an article in the Wall Street Journal (Bachman & Saunders, 2018):

Seat donations are a longtime practice of many athletic departments. Under this policy, fans of prominent college sports programs across the country typically donate $50 to $4,000 or more per seat to a school’s athletic foundation. In return, fans get the right to buy season tickets in stadiums’ premium locations. Under prior law, fans could take an 80% tax deduction for the seat donation. These seat donations became integral to college athletic fundraising. Often, the donation far exceeds the cost of the tickets. At many schools, donations and other tax-deductible donations also yield priority points, loyalty rewards that accumulate over years. Donors with the most points get first crack at choice seats when available, plus other benefits. But now the seat donation write-off is gone.

This law has now changed and restricts what constitutes a gift for tax purposes, and if there is a benefit received by the donor. Thus, in the past two years, universities and colleges across the country have had to rethink what type of athletic tickets and other athletics benefits will be allowed under this new policy, while at the same time being mindful of what benefits might appeal to a donor in order for them to continue to give donations to the athletic department. Similarly, donors need to seek counsel to make sure their gifts are still considered charitable giving that can be used for itemized deductions on their federal and state tax returns.
This new law around ticket benefits also came at the same time when the 2017 United States Congress changed the tax laws that made it more advantageous for most citizens to take a standard tax deduction of $24,000 for a couple, and thus, decrease the incentive for most individuals to itemize their taxes, which includes charitable gifts.

In the first year that data was available on this tax change, the impacts on non-profit organizations was considerable. According to an article in *Bloomberg* (Davison, 2019):

Only about 18 million taxpayers itemized in 2018 down from 46.5 million the year before, according to estimates from the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation. About 88% of filers last year took the standard deduction, which means they couldn’t write off their donations….that change could cost as much as $515 billion over a decade, according to estimates from the Tax Foundation.

These two recent changes in tax law and policy in our country present a unique implication that could drastically impact philanthropy. Many alumni in this study indicated one reason they gave to the university athletic program was because of the benefits they had received. With fewer, or no, tax benefits in giving donations to non-profit organizations, and no ancillary athletic benefits for giving, will alumni still feel compelled to give to colleges and universities in the future? With these new laws going into effect in 2017 and 2018, it is still too early to tell what ramifications this will have on alumni’s motivations and desires to give monetary donations.

**Implications for Researchers and Social Exchange Theory**

This study built on the quantitative research that had already been conducted concerning why alumni and student-athletes give philanthropic gifts, including to their alma mater. In particular, this study built on the work of O’Neil and Schenke (2007) concerning student-athlete alumni at a southwest university. Findings from O’Neil and Schenke’s study included that
athlete attitudinal factors were predictive of the giving amount, consistent with SET. Another finding was that most participants believed that Southwest School benefited from the athletic teams’ performance, but this did not impact their giving levels. The two most common reasons that athlete alumni did not give was because of a bad experience at the school and the perception that they had already given resources of their time and talents. According to O’Neil and Schenke (2007), athlete alumni may feel they have given enough to their schools by playing sports, and they may feel greater loyalty to their former sports teams than their alma maters. Drawing on SET, this study investigated whether such attitudes among athlete alumni at a U.S. university were related to lifetime donations. Results from their study indicated that the quality of alumni athletic experiences and the perception that they have already given to their school by playing sports were predictive of giving amount, and similar to the general alumni donor, the variables of age, income, and geography were also found to be related to giving level.

One premise for O’Neil and Schenke’s study was that alumni may have thought they already gave the university their time and talents as student-athletes, and thus, they did not feel compelled or inclined to give monetary donations now as alumni. This proved not to be true in this study, even though some alumni expressed that they gave Theodore a great deal; they devoted most of their time practicing, performing, and traveling to represent Theodore at the NCAA Division I collegiate level, the participants in this study did not think they shouldn’t give to Theodore because of their student-athlete service; there was no feeling of “I already paid it forward” with time and service to Theodore.

When examining SET in this study, there were several examples from the subject interviews that related to what Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) discussed in regard to reciprocity as a cultural expectation. For example, in this study, there was the feeling of indebtedness to pay
back a scholarship that the alumni had received. For some of these alumni, that “debt” had been paid off with their donations already, and so they believed that they had already met their share of the exchange between Theodore and their donations to their alma mater. For these individuals, their decision to give monetary support going forward was motivated by other means, including their sense of community and for specific projects. For other alumni who had not given as much back to Theodore, there was a sense of a transaction that had not been fully paid off yet and was still “owed” by the alumni.

When analyzing the results of the scholarship student-athletes in this study, an interesting finding related to the tenants of SET is among those participants who had a full-ride scholarship to play their sport at Theodore. There was an assumption that those alumni who had a full-ride scholarship might feel more obligated to give back to their alma mater to pay back the scholarship. When asked about their feelings of giving back to Theodore because of the athletic scholarship they received, several participants who had an athletic scholarship did not feel compelled to give back for that reason alone.

Another related premise with this study was that these student-athlete alumni would feel a closer connection to the team, their coach, and the athletic department, and thus, be less likely to support the institution overall. While there were some outliers, most participants did feel a stronger sense of obligation to their team and the athletic department, and would feel more compelled to give to athletics, or at least partially to athletics, because they were student-athletes.

Another example of SET in this study related to the exchange of athletic ticket benefits. For those participants who indicated they had limited discretionary funds (for example a fixed income in retirement), there was a desire for Theodore to recognize their lifetime giving and lifetime contributions to Theodore.
Further research is needed to draw upon SET as a model to predict and explain philanthropic behavior, particularly as the theory relates to university alumni being philanthropic with their alma mater.

**Limitations of This Study**

This study had limitations including the range of years that the alumni graduated, the sports represented, and whether the alumni had an athletic scholarship. An inherent bias in this study was that individuals who chose to participate in this study, even if they had not given monetary donations to Theodore, still felt inclined to be philanthropic at some level versus individuals who did not participate in this study who perhaps were just not philanthropic at all. During the recruitment process for this study, it was much more challenging to find participants who were non-giving, and easier to find participants for the study who had been giving. If this study had focused only on the population of alumni who were not giving the findings may have been very different. This is a need for further research—why many alumni chose not to give back or be engaged with their alma mater, even for those alumni who had full scholarships.

When examining SET in this study, there were several examples from the subject interviews that related to what Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) discussed in regard to reciprocity as a cultural expectation. For example, in this study, there was the feeling of indebtedness to pay back a scholarship that the alumni had received. For some of these alumni, that “debt” had been paid off with their donations already, and so they believed that they had already met their share of the exchange between Theodore and their donations to their alma mater. For these individuals, their decision to give monetary support going forward was motivated by other means, including their sense of community and for specific projects. For other alumni who had not given as much back to Theodore, there was a sense of transaction that had not been fully paid off yet and was still “owed” by the alumni. Thus, my interpretation and meaning of these
exchanges for this study coincide with previous studies in that there was a sense of reciprocity for these alumni who had a full-tuition scholarship and the desire to pay it back, but over time, those desires dissipated, and the decision to give back to their alma mater was based more on personal exchanges and connections that the university provided to the alumni. The limitations in using SET for this study should be noted, particularly related to the interdependency of the exchange that many authors of the theory suggest; this study, however, looked at the independence of the experiences of the subjects.

The significance of this study was in providing context to Theodore University and other university leaders about why alumni who were student-athletes chose either to give or not give back monetary donations to their alma mater. Additionally, many of the findings in this study could be applied to the fundraising work of other nonprofits. Also, this study seemed to be a benefit to the participants too, as many of the alumni who were interviewed thanked me for talking to them about this topic and asked for a copy of the report.

Practically, this study could be used immediately by administrators in the university advancement office at Theodore University who are looking for ways to garner more philanthropic gifts from alumni as well as by advancement and alumni officials at other universities.

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, very little scholarly qualitative research has been published about why alumni who were student-athletes choose to either give or not give to their alma mater, and then to compare those findings to existing studies about general alumni philanthropic tendencies. Furthermore, this research needs to be expanded to include other universities, and other subsets of the alumni and donor bases to continue to identify trends, patterns, and themes for alumni giving and philanthropy, which would require a trend data
analysis study. Further research is also needed from peer institutions of Theodore to see if their alumni giving characteristics, particularly for those alumni who were student-athletes, is similar to the findings found in this study.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

Tim Tesar

November 2018

Interview Protocol Questions

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in a study of selected Theodore University alumni. This select group are those Theodore alumni who were student-athletes during their studies at Theodore.

My research project focuses on the propensity of select Theodore University alumni to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore as a philanthropic gift. My study does not aim to evaluate your personal experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about philanthropic support of higher education, and hopefully learn about unique characteristics of alumni that lend themselves to philanthropic giving to one’s alma mater, in this case, Theodore University.

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to record our conversations today. The purpose is to allow me to get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all comments without any reference to individuals. For your information, I will be the only person privy to the recordings of the interview which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed.

Before we begin I asked you to sign a consent form. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read and sign this preamble (read and sign consent form).

We have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

(Turn recorder on).

Good morning (afternoon). My name is Tim Tesar. Thank you for coming. During this interview I will ask you about your experiences as a Theodore University alumni. The purpose of the interview is to get your insights, perceptions, comments and thoughts about your personal experiences while you were a student at Theodore, your activities after graduating from Theodore, and your personal philanthropic tendencies to Theodore, and to other non-profit organizations. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. The results of this research will provide useful information to senior leaders at Theodore University, and other higher education institutions, in helping them to develop, structure and manage their alumni outreach and communication as it relates to monetary support and philanthropic giving from university alumni.

Your responses will be kept anonymous during all phases of this study including any writings, published or not. Procedures for maintaining confidentiality are as follows: (1) individual participants will be only identified using a code or pseudonym name, and Theodore University will not be specifically identified; and (2) recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be kept on CyBox, an encrypted and password protected data storage site for students of Iowa State University, and not shared with anyone else.
1) Can you please confirm that you are a Theodore University alumnus, and while you were attending Theodore, you were a student-athlete?

2) What factors led you to choose Theodore as a prospective student?

3) What sport(s) did you play at Theodore, and for how long? Did you have a scholarship to play this sport? If so, what percentage of the scholarship covered your tuition, fees, room and board at Theodore?

3) What other activities, organizations, or clubs were you involved with during your time at Theodore?

4) What was your academic major(s) at Theodore, and did you ever change your academic interests while completing your degree at Theodore?

5) Looking back at your overall experience at Theodore as an undergraduate student, how pleased were you with your time at Theodore? What made your time at Theodore memorable, enjoyable, or helpful to you personally or professionally? What concerns did you have during your time at Theodore either as a student, or as an alumnus?

6) Could you briefly describe your activities after graduating from Theodore? For example, your career path, or personal pursuits.

7) Have you ever received a notification (via letter, email, social media, phone call, or personal solicitation) from Theodore to give monetary support to Theodore? If so, about how many solicitations do you think you’ve received? About how many annual solicitations do you receive?

8) Theodore records indicate that you have given XYZ monetary donations to Theodore. Does this seem accurate to you? OR

9) If you’ve never given a monetary gift to Theodore, could you please indicate why?

10) Why do you feel that alumni should or should not give monetary support to Theodore?

11) Do you give monetary support to any other non-profit organizations (such as religious organizations, charities, etc). If so, how does your monetary support of these other non-profit organizations compare to your philanthropic support of Theodore?

12) How would you describe a philanthropic person? Would you consider yourself to fit this description?

13) Are there particular elements of your professional or personal life that dictate how you give monetary support to Theodore, or other non-profit organizations?

14) You were a student-athlete at Theodore. (You did or did not have a scholarship as a student-athlete). Does that fact have an influence on your propensity to give, or not to give, monetary support to Theodore now as an alumnus? Why do you feel this way?

15) Looking into the future, do you think your monetary support of Theodore will change? Why or why not?

16) Are there any other thoughts or comments you would like to share with me today about your philanthropic, monetary support of Theodore, either in the past, currently, or in the future?
APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT EMAIL TEMPLATE

Recruitment Letter Email

E-mail Subject Line: Research Study on Philanthropic Tendencies of Theodore University Alumni - Interview Request from a PhD Student at Iowa State University

XXX, 2018

Dear <<insert name>>:

I invite you to participate in a research study about philanthropic tendencies in higher education, specifically for Theodore University. This study is being conducted by Tim Tesar, PhD candidate, at Iowa State University. This study will examine the giving patterns, or philanthropic tendencies, of Theodore University alumni who were student athletes at Theodore. This study will ask questions about why select Theodore University alumni choose to either give, or not give, monetary support to Theodore.

I obtained your contact information through Theodore University Alumni records, with approval of the Theodore University alumni and advancement office. It should be noted that in addition to being a PhD candidate at Iowa State University, I’m also an employee of Theodore University, in the Theodore alumni and advancement office. I’m also an alumni of Theodore University – I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in 2006.

Your participation is requested in the form of an approximately 60-minute interview. This interview can be conducted in person or over the phone. I am hoping to conduct interviews in the next 1 to 4 weeks. Please know that I’m available to conduct an interview at any time (day, night, weekend) that is most convenient for you. If you could please let me know by XXX if you will be able to participate in my research project I would appreciate it.

If you have questions, or would like more information about this study, please contact me at ttesar@iastate.edu or at 310-625-6833.

Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Tim Tesar

Iowa State University

PhD candidate, Higher Education Administration
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Theodore University Alumni Philanthropic Tendencies

Investigator: Timothy Tesar

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate—please review it carefully. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time.

Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the giving patterns, or philanthropic tendencies, of Theodore University alumni who were student-athletes when they were a student at Theodore. This study will ask questions about why select Theodore University alumni choose to either give or not give monetary support back to Theodore.

Eligibility to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as a Theodore University alumni, who was a student-athlete when you were a student at Theodore.

You should not participate if you don’t feel comfortable answering questions about your personal philanthropic behaviors, or if you don’t feel comfortable answering questions about your philanthropic relationship with Theodore University.

Description of Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the primary researcher. The interview will take place in person, or over the phone, and will last approximately 60 minutes, depending on the depth of answers provided. The interview questions will ask you personal questions about your experience at Theodore University, your activities after graduating from Theodore, and your philanthropic behaviors with Theodore, and other non-profit organizations. Your responses in the interview will be audio recorded in order for the principal investigator to analyze your responses at a later date.

Expected Time or Duration of Participation:

Your participation will last for approximately 60 minutes, depending on the depth of answers provided in the interview.
Risks or Discomforts

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks or discomforts:

- Psychological risks: The nature of the research questions will ask Theodore alumni to reveal information about their personal philanthropic behavior that may elicit some emotional discomfort.
- Social risks: Because the research questions will ask Theodore alumni about their personal philanthropic behavior, this may cause interviewees some embarrassment or emotional discomfort from answering sensitive questions during an interview, or stigmatization if their participation becomes known.
- Informational risks: Because some of the answers by participants may cause embarrassment, anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- Discomfort from being interviewed

There may be risks or discomforts that are currently unforeseeable at this time. We will tell you about any significant new information we learn that may relate to your willingness to continue participating in this study.

Benefits to You and to Others

It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing information to researchers, and college and university administrators, about the philanthropic tendencies towards one’s alma mater. Many colleges and universities rely on alumni giving to help sustain and advance the institution. Insights gained from this research project will hopefully add to the existing literature on the propensity for alumni to give, or not to give back, to their alma mater monetarily.

You are not expected to directly benefit from participation in the study.

Costs and Compensation

You will not have any costs from participating in this study.

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Your Rights as a Research Participant

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Answers you provide will not impact your current or future relationship with Theodore University, or with the primary investigator. Your choice of whether or not to participate will have no effect on your status as an alumni of Theodore University in any way.

- If you withdraw from the study early you can elect to wish to have your responses included as a part of the study, or not.
• We may end your participation in the study if any unforeseen circumstances happen during the interview.
• Data collected up to the point of withdrawal will be retained for research purposes, unless the participant wishes his/her responses to be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Confidentiality

Research records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available without your permission. However, it is possible that other people and offices responsible for making sure research is done safely and responsibly will see your information. This includes federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To protect confidentiality of the study records and data, the following measures will be taken: Interviewees’ personal information will not be disclosed at any point of the research process, including during data collection/interviews, and during the post-interview discussion. When writing the findings for this project all subjects will be given a false name and not identified by anything that could lead to their true identity. Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be kept on an encrypted and password protected laptop of the primary researcher, and not shared with anyone else. Transcriptions of the interviews that are written or printed will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher. A code key will be used that will keep interviewees names identified only as a pseudonym name and institution. This participation key will be kept in a separate file and password protected by the primary researcher.

Electronic file copies of the interview recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a personal laptop of the primary researcher which is encrypted and password protected. Consent forms and written transcriptions of the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the primary researcher. All electronic files will be password protected on a personal, encrypted laptop. Physical copies or written documents will be placed in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher, in which the researcher has the only key.

Destruction of participant identifiers will occur after the research project is concluded. The primary investigator will retain the de-identified data indefinitely.

To protect your confidentiality when results of the study are reported, the following measures will be taken: participants’ identity will never be published, nor will attributes that could easily link the participant to the study.

In full effort of disclosure, it should be noted that the principal investigator, Mr. Tim Tesar, is an employee of Theodore University, in the Theodore alumni and advancement office. Mr. Tesar is also a PhD candidate at Iowa State University.

Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact Tim Tesar at ttesar@iastate.edu or 310-625-6833. The supervisor for this project is Dr. Linda Hagedorn, lindah@iastate.edu or 515-294-5796.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study involves before you sign. If you have any questions about the study after you agree to participate, you can contact
the research team using the information provided above.

_I agree to take part in this study. I also agree that the research team may obtain information from my alumni records, as described in this document, for the research._

Participant’s Name (printed) ______________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________ Date ______________________________________________________________

Participant’s Signature

You may print a copy of this form for your files.

☐ _I certify that I am 18 years of age or over and agree to participate in this research study._

☐ _I also agree that the research team may obtain information from my alumni records, as described in this document, for the research._
APPENDIX D. IRB APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515 294-4566

Date: 03/28/2018
To: Tim Tesar Linda Hagedorn
From: Office for Responsible Research
Title: Drake University Alumni Philanthropic Tendencies
IRB ID: 18-147
Submission Type: Initial Submission Exemption Dates: 03/28/2018

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

2: Research involving use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior, unless (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, and (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

• You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.

• You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

IRB 03/2018