Cultivating Philanthropy in College Students: Education, Connection, and Networking

There has been a decade long pattern of downturn in the US economy (McAlexander & Koenig, 2012). Visible after the recession of 2008, the poor state of the US economy has exacerbated the effects of job termination, decline in the value of individual assets, and financial restrictions. Nonprofit organizations, whose primary sources of income are private donors, have also suffered. Financial restraints diminish private donors’ ability to expend funds to help further the mission of nonprofit organizations, including private and public universities.

Public universities have lost alarming amounts of support from both private donors and the state (Ranganathan & Henley, 2007). For example, between the 20 years from 1990 to 2010, state support of public universities fell approximately 26% (Quinterno & Orozco, 2012, p. 7). This, in turn, led the cost of education to rise nearly 116% for students and their families. Publicly-funded universities are traditionally known for their low tuition costs (Ranganathan & Henley, 2007). However, the state can no longer support these costs and now requires universities to seek independent sources of support. In response, many public universities instituted development offices targeted at cultivating philanthropic support for their institutions (McAlexander & Koenig, 2012). Now, more than ever, development professionals look to cultivate philanthropy among students, alumni, and community partners in order to support the mission of their institutions.

To maximize the return on efforts put forth by development offices, many academicians and professionals have focused their research on characteristics of donors who engage in philanthropic behavior (Webb, Green, & Brashear, 2000). After differentiating between attitudes toward helping others (AHO, or views of helping and assisting others), and attitudes toward charitable organizations (ACO, or views of the mission of a nonprofit organization), Webb et al. (2000) concluded that donors with high levels of both AHO and ACO demonstrate high levels of
philanthropic behavior. In addition, ACO correlated with the magnitude of the donation. Extending on these findings, another study found that religiosity, where helping those in need is valued, was found to positively influence AHO and ACO (Ranganathan & Henley, 2007). Consonant with the previous study, ACO seems to be a strong antecedent variable influencing decisions to donate to a nonprofit organization.

As shown, attitudes toward nonprofit organizations (i.e., private and public universities) can influence donor behavior. However, these attitudes have the propensity to change over time. For example, many alumni choose not to donate because they no longer feel connected to their undergraduate institution (McAlexander & Koenig, 2012). If universities do not maintain consistent communication with alumni, it may prove especially difficult to reengage alumni in philanthropic relationships. In addition, evidence suggests many alumni who continue to connect with their undergraduate institution were involved in campus activities as students (Holmes, 2009). Participation in any kind of undergraduate activity positively correlated with philanthropic behavior. Specifically, alumni who participated in fundraisers during their time as undergraduates were 23% more likely to engage philanthropically, donating 82% more than alumni who did not participate as students (p. 27). It appears that engaging in activities as an undergraduate fosters a connection to the university – a connection that has the potential to last long after graduation.

Further exploration of the importance of participation and connection, Drezner (2010) conducted interviews with undergraduates who participated in fundraising activities for the university. These students were asked about their perceived connection to the university, why philanthropy is important, and their intentions for giving as alumni (Drezner, 2010). Findings indicated that involvement in fundraising activities educated students about the history of the university and fostered an increased sense of connection. In addition, students reported having a
greater understanding of the importance of philanthropy as a result of their involvement. Although the author never followed up with student participants as alumni, many indicated an increased desire to remain connected to the university after graduation.

What motivates students to participate in fundraising campaigns? Researchers concluded that the perceived importance of the campaign, social value of the organization, and recognition received positively correlated with the level of commitment to the campaign (Ranganathan, Loebl, & Radosevich, 2012). This commitment, in turn, positively influenced philanthropic behavior among students. Thus, similar to the findings of Drezner (2010), students have reasons for engaging in philanthropic behavior, and this behavior can be learned through involvement in campus activities.

The concept of philanthropy can be understood in the context of several developmental theories. According to Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory, individuals encounter eight developmental crises that need to be resolved throughout their lifetime (Erikson, 1950). In the seventh crisis, individuals must resolve the crisis between generativity, or giving back to future generations, and stagnation, or disengagement from society. Stagnation can occur if an individual does not feel needed or connected to society. However, if individuals are able to understand their role in society and the ways in which they can transcend that role, they may be able to resolve this crisis and achieve generativity.

Although this crisis typically occurs when individuals are middle aged, contributing to development of generativity in college will increase the likelihood that individuals will resolve this crisis successfully as they age (Erikson, 1950). To facilitate the development of generativity, universities need to provide opportunities for students to get involved in activities that support the university and community. This involvement allows students to incorporate generativity in to
their ideological identity. Universities that foster generativity while students are still in college can promote continued concern for the welfare of the university (Evans, 2010).

Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development is also relevant to the development of philanthropy in college students (Kohlberg, 1976). In this theory, six stages of moral development are grouped into three moral levels: 1) preconventional, or viewing rules and expectations as external to the self; 2) conventional, or internalizing rules and expectations by authorities; and 3) postconventional, or separating the self from rules and expectations of others and living by a set of values and principles chosen by the self. In stage 4 of the conventional level, referred to as Social System and Conscience, individuals believe that contributing to the welfare of society is expected of them. Universities should be striving to provide opportunities for college students to reach stage 4 of Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development.

To facilitate moral development, both exposure to higher levels of thinking and disequilibrium, an imbalance between internal and external morals, are necessary (Kohlberg, 1976). It is likely that students will interact with others that exhibit higher stages of moral reasoning in the college environment (Evans, 2010). It is also likely that students will experience disequilibrium when new experiences in the college environment contradict their internalized life experiences. The nature of the college experience provides opportunities for students to develop as moral, philanthropic individuals. However, universities should promote student involvement in campus activities to ensure their moral development.

Building on Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development, Self-Determination Theory differentiates two forms of motivation (Ranganathan, Loebl, & Radosevich, 2012). Understanding the difference between intrinsic motivation, or acting on an internal desire to give back, and extrinsic motivation, or acting for an external result, is important in trying to examine why students choose to act in philanthropic ways. These motivational differences are similar to
Kohlberg’s three moral levels. To maximize the potential for moral development, universities need to provide opportunities that accommodate students’ diverse levels of moral development and sources of motivation.

It seems clear that development professionals should focus on cultivating philanthropy at their universities. Philanthropic development during college will allow students to practice and continue a pattern of philanthropy and engagement as alumni. Student philanthropy programs have been put in to place at other universities. At Binghamton University, the Senior Challenge Program encourages graduating seniors to make a contribution to the Binghamton Fund, a branch of the Binghamton University Foundation that manages gifts made to the university (Catapano, 2007). This approach has not fulfilled expectations, however, because participation in the program has decreased from 11% to 1% over the course of 22 years (p. 10). Another example, the Traditions Program at the University of Pennsylvania, targets students at the beginning of their freshman year, up through graduation. As a result of this program and involving students of all ages in philanthropic activities, the university has experienced a 30% increase in gifts made to the university by the senior class (p. 32).

The State University of New York, College at Oswego, hereby referred to as SUNY Oswego, is one of thirteen university colleges in the SUNY system (Fast, 2012). SUNY Oswego maintains three campuses in Central New York, including the main campus in the city of Oswego and satellite centers in Phoenix and Syracuse. Approximately 110 academic and cooperative education programs are offered through SUNY Oswego. Currently, SUNY Oswego enrolls more than 8,000 students, 6,500 of them full-time undergraduates. The mission of the university is stated as follows; “Our mission is to contribute to the common good by lighting the path to wisdom and empowering women and men to pursue meaningful lives as productive, responsible citizens” (Engage, 2012).
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The Oswego College Foundation Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, was established in 1947 (Oswego, 2012). The goal of the Oswego College Foundation Inc. is to raise sufficient funding to support the mission of SUNY Oswego. To manage gifts made to the university, The Oswego College Foundation Inc. created the Fund for Oswego. All gifts made to SUNY Oswego, including those made by students and alumni, are managed by the Fund for Oswego. The staff of the offices of University Development and Alumni Relations work together to support the mission of the university.

Currently, SUNY Oswego maintains two separate student philanthropy programs to achieve institutional goals. The first, a senior class gift program, encourages seniors to make a contribution to a class gift. However, ongoing construction on campus prohibits students from giving a tangible gift, thus students must make unrestricted gifts. Unrestricted gifts are used to address the university’s greatest needs. Since involvement in senior class gift program has steadily decreased, SUNY Oswego could benefit from educating students about the importance of philanthropy and how gifts are used. SUNY Oswego also has a pre-alumni student organization, the Future Alumni Network (FANs), which was recognized by Affiliated Student Advancement Programs (ASAP) in 2007. The success of the senior class gift program is supported by efforts sponsored by FANs. However, because the rate of participation in the program has decreased, the time has come to reevaluate the effectiveness of both programs.

Many student philanthropy programs target one age group, expecting students to have reached similar levels of psychosocial and moral development. The proposed program will create a new pre-alumni council that gives students of all ages and levels of development opportunities to develop as engaged, philanthropic citizens. The pre-alumni council will foster philanthropic development through initiatives that target education, connection to the university, and networking with alumni. It is imperative that students have the opportunity to develop and
practice philanthropic behavior while still in college so that, upon becoming alumni, they are likely to continue this behavior and contribute to the future of the university.

Implementation goals include establishing the pre-alumni council, which includes registering the organization with the office of Student Activities and appointing two staff members to advise the organization. One staff member from both the University Development and Alumni Relations offices will be appointed. These staff advisors will create internship descriptions for an Event Coordinator, Public Relations Coordinator, and Volunteer Coordinator and submit descriptions to the office of Experienced Based Education for approval. Upon approval, staff advisors will be expected to recruit interns and volunteers for the pre-alumni council. After interns have been appointed, staff advisors and interns will set up the office space with needed materials and work out office, staff, and organization meeting hours for the following academic year.

Intermediate goals include planning and executing a series of varied events that will take place over the course of one academic year. These events will be targeted at achieving at least one of three criteria: 1) education; 2) connection; or 3) networking. In honor of National Philanthropy Day occurring November 15, a table in the student union will be used to educate students about the importance of philanthropy. To foster a connection to the university, a monthly school color day will be established to promote school spirit. Also, an annual alumni symposium for each school or college within the university will be organized to provide students the opportunity to network with alumni. These examples serve to achieve each of the three outcome goals of the pre-alumni council.

Short term outcome goals include educating students about the history of the university and the importance of philanthropy, fostering a connection to the university through increased opportunities for involvement, and providing professional development opportunities for
students to network with alumni. Opportunities for education, connection, and networking will produce the long term outcome goal of cultivating a philanthropic student body that will continue to be involved in and give back to the university and community throughout their lifetime. Figure 1 provides the brief description, purpose, implementation goals, intermediate goals, and outcome goals of the pre-alumni council program.
Figure 1

Impact Model

**Brief Description and Purpose**

The proposed program is to create a student pre-alumni council for the university. The purpose of the proposed program is to cultivate philanthropy among young adults to foster their development, in keeping with the mission of the university. The target population is the student body. Stakeholders include the university foundation and fund, staff members of the offices of University Development and Alumni Relations, and students and alumni of the university.

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**Implementation Goals**

1. Appoint 2 staff advisors to the pre-alumni council, one from the University Development office and one from the Alumni Relations office
2. Register the pre-alumni council and submit a request for funding
3. Create and submit Event Coordinator, Public Relations Coordinator, and Volunteer Coordinator internship position descriptions for approval
4. Reserve office, meeting, and event space, collect materials, and establish office hours and meeting times
5. Advertise internship positions, conduct interviews, hire and train 6 Coordinator interns, and recruit volunteers

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**Intermediate Goals**

1. Plan and implement a series of events targeting students over the course of one academic year, including events targeting the following:
   a. Education, e.g., A table in the student union for National Philanthropy Day, occurring from 9AM – 3PM on November 15
   b. Connection, e.g., A monthly school color day, occurring the first Friday of every month, all day
   c. Networking with alumni, e.g., An alumni symposium will be organized for each school or college within the university. These events will occur once a year

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**Outcome Goals**

**Short Term**

1. Educate students about the history of the university and the importance of philanthropy
2. Foster a connection to the university through increased opportunities for involvement
3. Provide professional development opportunities for students to network with alumni

**Long Term**

1. Cultivate a philanthropic student body that will continue to be involved in and give back to the university and community throughout their lifetime
Method

Participants

Participants include SUNY Oswego undergraduate students that choose to be involved in the pre-alumni council or events sponsored by the program. Although anyone can attend pre-alumni council events, the program is targeted at promoting the philanthropic development of undergraduate students. Currently, SUNY Oswego enrolls 6,500 undergraduate students, 4,100 of whom reside on campus (Fast, 2012). In addition, the incoming freshmen class of 1,300 students had a mean grade point average of 90 and SAT score of 1110. There is no need to establish a control group as the change in philanthropic behavior as a result of participating in pre-alumni council events is being evaluated.

Program Design and Components

The first implementation goal includes appointing two staff members to advise the new pre-alumni council. There are two staff advisors because each serves a distinct role in the new organization. The first, a staff member of the University Development office, is primarily responsible for monitoring gifts made to the university. The other, a staff member of the Alumni Relations office, is responsible for monitoring involvement at university events and contacting alumni. Staff members interested in becoming advisors to the pre-alumni council can appoint themselves. If more than one person from each office is interested, the head of each department will decide which staff member will represent their office and advise the pre-alumni council. Both advisors will be responsible for overseeing the organization and collaborating with various university offices as needed. After two advisors are appointed, they will be responsible for the next implementation goal: registering the pre-alumni council with the office of Student Activities and submitting a request for funding. Once the organization is approved and funding is secured, the advisors will collaborate to create positions descriptions for undergraduate student internship
opportunities within the pre-alumni council. Position descriptions for Event Coordinator, Public Relations Coordinator, and Volunteer Coordinator must be submitted to the office of Experienced-Based Education for approval.

The Event Coordinator will be responsible for taking notes at all meetings, submitting these notes to all staff advisors and interns, scheduling events, reserving and securing space for events, preparing detailed event plans in conjunction with other offices, and collecting materials for events. The Public Relations Coordinator will be responsible for acting as a liaison between the pre-alumni council and university offices and student organizations, promoting events through advertisements, flyers, posters, digital signage, and social media outlets, documenting events with photography and video recordings, and designing the website for the pre-alumni council. The Volunteer Coordinator will be responsible for recruiting pre-alumni council volunteers, updating volunteers with email announcements and changes to the website, scheduling volunteer shifts for events to ensure events are sufficiently staffed, and training volunteers to fill specific roles at events. These 3 internship positions will be available for 3 credits per semester, totaling 120 total hours per semester, approximately eight to ten hours per week.

After these internship positions have been approved, the next implementation goal includes screening and appointing interns. There will be a total of six internship positions available, with two people filling each of the three internship roles. Due to the number and magnitude of new events, two students in each role are required. Both staff advisors will collaborate to advertise the internship positions through flyers around campus, schedule and conduct interviews with interested students, and appoint six students to the internship positions for the following academic year. Advisors will also reserve office space for the academic year and set up the office with materials. Required supplies include three desks, each with its own
desktop computer and access to the internet and Microsoft Office Suite programs, three chairs, a printer, scanner, digital camera, landline phone, and photocopier, various colors and sizes of paper, a mailbox, storage unit, and filing cabinet, calendar, and general office supplies including pens, pencils, and highlighters, a stapler with staples, tape, push pins, and post-it notes. In addition, incentives will be established for participation in events or evaluations. University paraphernalia, such as clothing, mugs, and other emblematic items, will be used as incentives.

The summer prior to the academic year of appointment, the advisors will contact the Coordinator interns to work out a schedule for office hours and weekly meetings. Scheduling hours will be the only requirement during the summer, as Coordinator interns will not receive academic credit prior to their year of appointment. The next implementation goal is to train the Coordinator interns for their specific responsibilities. Training will occur during the Coordinator interns’ office hours, the first week of the semester. Training should include an introduction to staff members in both the University Development and Alumni Relations offices, an overview of the functions of each office, a tour of the pre-alumni council office space, a tutorial of Microsoft Office Suite programs, a review of the interns’ specific job description, and a discussion of expectations for the year.

Intermediate goals include planning and executing a series of varied events that will take place over the course of one academic year. Among the first events to be organized are the bi-monthly meetings for the pre-alumni council. After dates, times, and locations are submitted to and approved by the office of Event Management, all advisors and Coordinator interns will work together to promote the pre-alumni council and recruit volunteers. The Event Coordinators will reserve event space to promote the organization. Next, the Public Relations Coordinators will design flyers to post around campus and compose targeted social media messages. The Volunteer Coordinators will act as the point of contact for volunteers. In addition, Volunteer Coordinators
must be well-versed in the benefits of joining the pre-alumni council in order to motivate students of all ages and levels of psychosocial and moral development to join. At the first pre-alumni council meeting, Coordinator interns and advisors will introduce themselves to volunteers and talk about events for the year. Any following pre-alumni council meeting will be used to discuss upcoming events and record feedback from previous events.

Events should be targeted at achieving one of three criteria; education about philanthropy, connection to the university, and networking with alumni. These events will be discussed and organized at weekly Coordinator intern and advisor meetings. Some examples of events include a table for National Philanthropy Day occurring November 15 to educate students about philanthropy, a monthly school color day to establish a connection to the university, and an alumni symposium for each college or school within the university to give students the opportunity to network with alumni who graduated from their department. These events, and many others, are necessary to promote the philanthropic development of students.

Program Evaluation

The first short term outcome goal includes educating students about the history of the university and the importance of philanthropy. To measure education, learning outcomes for each event must be established to determine whether or not students learned what was originally intended. A qualitative email survey will be distributed to participants that attended an event. The survey should include question, “What did you learn as a result of attending this event?” Administrators may include other questions they find relevant to specific events. An incentive for participation in each survey will be established. An evaluation will be conducted between advisors and Coordinator interns, comparing the original learning outcomes to the participants’ responses. If the outcomes and responses are incongruent, a formative evaluation of the event should be conducted.
Another short term outcome goal includes fostering a connection between students and
the university through increased opportunities for involvement. To measure connection to the
university, the pre-alumni council will predict the number of people that will attend an event, and
record this number. The advisor from the Alumni Relations office will then be responsible for
taking and keeping record of attendance at events. Attendance can be kept in several ways. If an
event is small, the advisor can simply count the number of participants. If an event is large,
however, selling tickets or scanning IDs at the entrance of an event should be used to record
participants. An evaluation will be conducted between advisors and Coordinator interns,
discussing whether the number of participants predicted was equivalent to the number of
participants at the event. An increase or decrease in attendance, as well as the difference between
predicted and actual participants, will indicate whether a formative evaluation needs to occur.

The last short term outcome goal includes providing professional development
opportunities for students to network with alumni. To measure networking, the number of
networking events can simply be counted. The advisor from the Alumni Relations office will be
responsible for taking attendance of students and alumni who attend networking events. Advisors
and coordinators will meet to evaluate networking events, discussing the number of attendants
and whether an increase or decrease of networking opportunities needs to occur. An increase or
decrease in attendance at networking events will indicate if a formative evaluation should occur.

The long term outcome goal of the program is to cultivate a philanthropic student body
that will continue to be involved in and give back to the university and community throughout
their lifetime. This goal is being measured first by taking attendance at all pre-alumni council
events, to determine if alumni come back and participate in events. This goal will also be
measured for changes in philanthropic behavior. The advisor from the University Development
office will examine yearly changes in the annual fiscal report published by the university. In
addition, Banner, software developed for higher education purposes, can track gifts by conducting targeted searches. These searches will be able to determine the date a gift is made, the gift amount, and information about the donor such as class year or course of study.

At the end of each academic year, all advisors and coordinators will hold a meeting to compile the findings of their evaluations. With these findings, they will make changes that will be implemented in pre-alumni council events the following academic year. All evaluations of these events will be archived by the advisor from the Alumni Relations office, and will be revisited to compare annual changes.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

There are several costs and benefits to the pre-alumni council. Beginning with costs, the pre-alumni council contains fixed, variable, direct, and indirect costs. There are very few fixed costs associated with the pre-alumni council. Since all advisor, intern, and volunteer positions are unpaid, there are no salary requirements. In addition, SUNY Oswego is currently factoring utility and building costs for King Alumni Hall into the budget. Examples of these costs include rent, electricity, water, heat, phone, and internet. In addition, all furniture and electronics necessary to fulfill job duties are available in the cellar of King Alumni Hall. However, the cost of office supplies needed to carry out job functions will remain somewhat consistent, and should be factored into the program budget. The pre-alumni council program also contains variable costs. The cost of each pre-alumni council event will differ based on the size and scale of the event. For example, if refreshments are going to be provided, the cost of catering an intimate workshop will differ from a campus-wide event. Also, if students or alumni require transportation to pre-alumni council events, transportation costs need to be factored into the budget for the event.

Direct costs of the pre-alumni council program include costs to implement events. Costs associated with catering, furniture and space rentals, decorations, printed materials, and staffing
for events will need to be factored in to the budget. Indirect costs are also associated in both the planning and implementation stages of an event. During the planning stages, communication by means of telephone and internet may increase, thus increasing the costs typically allotted for these services. In the implementation stages, events taking place during hours a building is typically closed will need to factor in costs to keep the building functioning.

Although there are costs associated with the pre-alumni council, universities will continue to reap the benefits of the program for years to come. Events targeted at education, connection, and networking will provide students with various opportunities to develop as philanthropic individuals. It is imperative that students have the opportunity to practice philanthropic behavior in college. Upon becoming alumni, these students will be more likely to continue philanthropic behaviors they learned in college and remain engaged in the wellbeing of the university. In addition, these students will continue the pattern of philanthropy in their own communities, contributing to the wellbeing of mankind.

Reporting and Utilization

Stakeholders of the pre-alumni council include the Oswego College Foundation and the Fund for Oswego, the offices of University Development and Alumni Relations, alumni of the university, and the advisors, interns, and members of the pre-alumni council. The Oswego College Foundation and Fund for Oswego will be shown a power point presentation revealing the effectiveness of the pre-alumni council. The presentation will include a report of student giving and a review of events including the name, date and time, learning outcomes, attendance, survey responses, and a general reflection. All data will be collected, compiled, and presented by the advisors. Whether or not the Oswego College Foundation and Fund for Oswego perceive events as successful will factor in to the funds allotted for the following academic year.
The same power point presentation will be revealed to the staff of the offices of University Development and Alumni Relations. Reporting the successes and downfalls of the program will be crucial in securing support from these offices in the future. An effort should be made to inform alumni about the pre-alumni council as well. An annual update of the pre-alumni council will be highlighted in the Oswego Alumni Magazine. This update will include a report of pre-alumni council activities, how alumni were able to get involved in activities, and ways alumni can promote the success of the pre-alumni council in the future.

Advisors and Coordinator interns will report the success of events at bi-monthly pre-alumni council meetings. This will include an informal presentation by advisors, which will reveal specific data relating to events. Members of the pre-alumni council will have an opportunity to give feedback about events at the meetings, which will be recorded by the Event Coordinator. Members of the pre-alumni council will also be recognized at a banquet at the end of the academic year. This event will serve to incorporate all three goals of the program; education, connection, and networking. The banquet will begin with a motivational speaker, preferably an alum, reminding students about the importance of philanthropy. Both staff advisors will follow with a brief presentation about successful events and the role of pre-alumni council members in that success. The Volunteer Coordinator will then follow by presenting awards to outstanding members of the pre-alumni council. Overall, this event will serve to encapsulate the purpose of the pre-alumni program.
References


