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## Original Article

# Does membership matter? Examining the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving

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**ABSTRACT** The author examined the relationship between alumni giving and membership in a dues-based alumni association. The researcher used the chi-square test of association to analyze population data derived from the database of a public doctoral-granting research university in the South. The study unveiled a relationship between membership and giving, with current alumni association members being 4.8 times more likely to be current university donors than non-members and 11.5 times more likely to be current donors with cumulative giving of at least US\$10000 as compared to non-members. Members were more likely to be donors and conversely, donors were also more likely to be alumni association members, but slightly more member donors became alumni association members *before* making their first gift to the university. Across membership type, life members were the best donor prospects. Alumni association life members were 1.4 times more likely than annual members to be current donors and 5.7 times more likely to be current donors compared to non-members. Life members were 4.3 times more likely than annual members and 19.8 times more likely than non-members to have cumulative university giving of at least \$10000. *International Journal of Educational Advancement* (2011) 10, 163–179.  
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## SUMMARY STATEMENT

Findings from this study indicate that alumni association membership and alumni giving are correlated, with alumni association members being significantly more likely to be university donors than non-members. These results impact the work of university advancement practitioners, as many alumni association decision-makers are currently investigating the possibility of moving from a dues-based organizational model to an open one. Conversely, at other alumni associations decreases in institutional funding are forcing decision-makers to examine the possibility of moving into a dues-based model but they are concerned that charging for membership dues might negatively impact alumni giving.

This study revealed that membership and giving are not only correlated, but slightly more member donors became alumni association members before making their first university gift. While findings are specific to the single institution studied and do not indicate causality, the reported relationship between membership and giving should provide practitioners with the motivation to look more closely at this relationship at their own institution before making major decisions about their alumni association's organizational model.

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP AND GIVING

Organized alumni groups in the United States trace their history to 1792 when Yale University graduates came together as an organized group (Gill, 1998). Williams College, a small liberal arts college located in Williamstown, Massachusetts,

established the first official alumni association in 1821. This group was originally called the 'society of alumni' and came into existence 28 years after the college was chartered. The group was founded to save the college after its president and several faculty and students left to launch another college, which ultimately became Amherst College (Dolbert, 2002). The purpose of the alumni association was stated by the committee of alumni who organized the group: 'The meeting is notified at the request of a number of gentlemen, educated at the institution, who are desirous that the true state of the college be known to the alumni' (Shaw *et al*, 1917, p. 11).

Early alumni associations that followed the organization of the Williams College alumni group include groups at Brown in 1823, Princeton in 1826, Miami College in 1832 and Amherst in 1842. The primary function of newly formed alumni associations of the 1800s was to communicate with alumni through publications, and these organizations were led by 'alumni secretaries', or executive directors as they are most commonly known today. Alumni association leaders gathered together in 1913 to create the Association of Alumni Secretaries professional organization (Curti and Nash, 1965), and 4 years after its inception, the association leaders produced a *Hand Book of Alumni Work* to provide direction and guiding principles for alumni associations.

This *Hand Book of Alumni Work* (Shaw *et al*, 1917) provided an early framework for membership dues programs that still exist today. The book proposed that alumni associations implement a dues-paying membership



structure in order to finance operations, recommending both annual and life membership dues options as well as proposing that alumni associations offer a variety of benefits to members to encourage membership. In 1917, dues for life membership at the Michigan Alumni Association were US\$35, payable \$5 per year over the course of 7 years (Shaw *et al*, 1917).

While alumni associations as dues-based organizations have been around for almost a century, there exists very little formal published research regarding the work of these organizations and the impact of membership dues on other facets of university advancement work, even that of its closely related counterpart, alumni giving. Recently, several large alumni associations in the United States have moved away from a dues-based model. Most notably, dues-based alumni association models at the University of Cincinnati, University of Illinois, University of Georgia and University of California, Santa Barbara, have recently shifted to an open membership model (Newman, 2010).

These changes have occurred despite the fact that many alumni association and university fundraising professionals anecdotally attest to the value of membership as a means to identify potential high-impact donors (Shoss, 2007). This study seeks to contribute an important component to the body of formal academic research by being one of the first to specifically study the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving. Results of this study will help university decision-makers best determine how to structure new alumni association models or modify existing ones.

Further, by potentially identifying alumni association membership as a variable that shares a relationship with alumni giving, university fundraisers can use this information to more effectively solicit donations from alumni. With state appropriations for higher education decreasing (Archibald and Feldman, 2006; Weerts and Ronca, 2006), endowment funding eroding (Haurwitz, 2008) and overall alumni giving declining (Council for Aid to Education, 2009), the topic of identifying ways to bolster alumni donations is relevant and important.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ALUMNI GIVING

In examining the potential role of alumni association membership as a characteristic of alumni giving, it is important to first study those variables that have previously been studied as predictors of alumni giving. Several studies of alumni giving have revealed that variables related to alumni experiences, student experiences, characteristics of the university and alumni characteristics all play a role.

Regarding alumni experiences, prior research has revealed that university legacies, alumni who have family members who have also graduated from their alma mater, are good donor prospects (Okunade and Berl, 1997; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Clotfelter, 2003a; Holmes, 2008). After graduating, alumni who attend university events more frequently, specifically reunions, are also more likely to contribute financially compared to alumni who are not as frequently involved (Grant and Lindauer, 1986; Olsen *et al*, 1989; Willemain *et al*, 1994; Hanson, 2000; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Holmes,

2008). Alumni who are more emotionally attached and loyal to the university are attractive donor prospects (Beeler, 1982), as are those who have knowledge of other donors (Okunade and Berl, 1997); seek out information about other alumni (Beeler, 1982); and are willing to recommend the university to others (Okunade and Berl, 1997).

Experiences gained during a graduate's time as a student at his or her alma mater also play a role in alumni giving. Studied student characteristics that share a positive relationship with alumni giving include positive undergraduate experiences (Beeler, 1982; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995; Stutler and Calvario, 1996; Belfield and Beney, 2000; Hanson, 2000; Monks, 2003; Clotfelter, 2003b); receipt of scholarships or grants (Beeler, 1982; Marr *et al*, 2005); involvement within non-academic campus groups (Keller, 1982; Haddad, 1986; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995; Harrison, 1995; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Monks, 2003; Clotfelter, 2003b; Marr *et al*, 2005; Harrison *et al*, 2006; Holmes, 2008); and academic success (Cunningham and Cochi-Ficano, 2002; Clotfelter, 2003b; Marr *et al*, 2005).

The propensity of a graduate to contribute to his or her alma mater is not exclusive to personal experiences, but specific characteristics of the institution are also a factor. Prior studies have revealed that alumni who graduated from 4-year colleges or universities are more likely to contribute financially than alumni from 2-year institutions (Cunningham and Cochi-Ficano, 2002); graduates of private institutions are more willing to donate to their alma mater than those

from public colleges and universities (Harrison, 1995); and perceived quality and prestige is also positively related to alumni giving (Leslie and Ramey, 1988; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Baade and Sundberg, 1996; Belfield and Beney, 2000; Hanson, 2000; Clotfelter, 2003b).

Finally, characteristics of alumni are also related to giving. Prior studies have revealed that older alumni are better donor prospects than younger alumni (Beeler, 1982; Keller, 1982; Haddad, 1986; Yankelovich, 1987; Olsen *et al*, 1989; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995; Okunade and Berl, 1997; Hanson, 2000; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Holmes, 2008) and wealthier alumni are more likely to contribute financially compared to their counterparts (Lindahl and Winship, 1994; Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995; Okunade and Berl, 1997; Hanson, 2000; Clotfelter, 2003b; Holmes, 2008). Type of degree plays a role in alumni giving, with alumni who hold degrees in the social sciences, and who are therefore likely employed in more lucrative positions, being the best donor prospects (Haddad, 1986; Hueston, 1992; Okunade and Berl, 1997; Monks, 2003; Marr *et al*, 2005; Holmes, 2008). Findings with regard to marital status are mixed, with some researchers reporting that unmarried alumni are more likely to donate than married alumni (Bruggink and Siddiqui, 1995; Belfield and Beney, 2000; Monks, 2003), and others finding that the converse is true (Okunade and Berl, 1997; Holmes, 2008). Studies that have examined gender as a predictor of alumni giving are also inconsistent. While most researchers have found no statistically significant difference between genders



(Okunade, 1996; Wunnava and Lauze, 2001; Monks, 2003; Clotfelter, 2003b; Marr *et al*, 2005), Bruggink and Siddiqui (1995) report that women are more likely to donate than men whereas Lindahl and Winship (1994) indicate that men are better donor prospects than women.

Very few studies have examined alumni association membership as a predictor of alumni giving. One such study, however, found that alumni demographic variables, including alumni association membership, did significantly distinguish alumni donors from non-donors (Sun *et al*, 2007). For purposes of this study, in addition to alumni association membership, the most closely related variable from prior studies is past giving. Findings from Lindahl and Winship (1994) and Okunade and Berl (1997) reveal that past giving is one of the most significant predictors of future giving from alumni.

At many alumni associations, membership is considered another form of financial contribution to the university. In a study of predictors of alumni association membership (Newman and Petrosko, forthcoming), the researchers found that alumni giving was the most significant predictor. With prior research revealing that past alumni giving is a predictor of future giving, specifically playing a role as a predictor of alumni association membership, it is clear that a relationship exists between alumni association membership and alumni giving. This article seeks to examine this relationship in further detail.

While some researchers have looked at both alumni association membership and alumni giving as potential predictors of future alumni giving,

there is very little research in existence that specifically examines the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving. In a multi-institution study by Patouillet (2000), the researcher posited that alumni association members across the studied institutions were approximately three times more likely to give than non-members (47 percent versus 16 percent).

In a 2007 study of university fundraising professionals conducted by the Performance Enhancement Group, 70 percent of respondents agreed that dues-paying alumni organizations are a great way to identify high-potential donors. With the need for university alumni and development offices to increase alumni giving, coupled with the fact that alumni association membership is related to alumni giving, it makes sense to study the relationship between giving and membership more closely.

## METHOD

### Research design

For this study, the researcher had access to data for the entire population of university graduates through the studied university's alumni database and data were examined to reveal the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving. The advantages of using extant data were: (1) the data were already available and required no collection or survey methods, (2) instead of using a sample to generalize to an entire population, the data allowed the researcher to examine the population directly, and (3) the information was more accurate than if it had been obtained from alumni self-reports.

The researcher used the chi-square test of association, which is a non-parametric test that allows a researcher to examine the relationship between two discrete variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). A benefit of chi-square analysis is that it requires no assumptions about the distribution of variables in the population. To examine the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving, the researcher used a 2×2 contingency table with dichotomous outcome variables including those pertaining to alumni association membership (*non-member*=0, *member*=1) and alumni giving (*non-donor*=0, *donor*=1). To examine whether the relationship between alumni association membership and alumni giving differed between those who were annual members and those who were life members, the researcher used a 2×3 contingency table with a trichotomized outcome variable related to alumni association membership type (*annual member*=1, *life member*=2, *not a member*=3).

In relation to this study, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive correlation between alumni giving and alumni association membership.

**Hypothesis 2:** The correlation between alumni giving and alumni association life membership will be greater than the correlation between alumni giving and alumni association annual membership.

### Limitations

This study is limited by the generalizability of the findings beyond the university studied to other alumni

populations across the country. Specifically, the data studied apply to the specific population studied, which comprises alumni from a single institution.

### Site

The population for this study was graduates of a large public doctoral-granting land-grant research university located in the South. Founded in 1865, it is the largest university in the state. In 2010, the university offered 93 undergraduate programs, 99 master programs, 66 doctoral programs and four professional programs, and had more than 27000 enrolled students.

At the time of the study, the university had 156356 living and addressable graduates who had received a bachelor's, master's or professional degree from the institution. The number of university *alumni*, which by the university's definition included all former students who have completed 12 or more credit hours, medical residents and certificate recipients, was 225207, but the researcher only included university graduates in the study. This decision was based upon the fact that universities only include data from university *graduates* in alumni giving reports provided to such reporting agencies as *US News and World Report*.

In addition, only addressable, living graduates were included in the analyses. At the time of this study, the university reported that 95 percent of its alumni records were complete and addressable and only approximately 5 percent were reported as lost.

It is also important to note that although the university under study, like many other schools, had a

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics for interval level variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age	124 692	45.15	15.05	21–102
Total university giving	156 356	\$1191.73	39214.00	\$0–\$9283 952
Number of university degrees	156 356	1.15	0.39	1–5
Number of years since most	—	—	—	—
Recent university graduation	156 309	22.52	15.45	0–80

**Table 2:** Percentages for dichotomous nominal level variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>
Current alumni association member (0=no, 1=yes)	83.1	16.9
Lapsed alumni association member (0=no, 1=yes)	85.2	14.8
Current or previous alumni association member (0=no, 1=yes)	68.3	31.7
Gender (0=male, 1=female)	51.5	48.5
US residence (0=no, 1=yes)	0.8	99.2
Kentucky residence (0=no, 1=yes)	43.9	56.1
Phone number on record (0=no, 1=yes)	31.4	68.6
Resides in alumni club area (0=no, 1=yes)	17.2	82.8
Current address on record (0=no, 1=yes)	99.3	0.7
Fellows donor over \$10 000 (0=no, 1=yes)	98.3	1.7
Current donor within prior year (0=no, 1=yes)	88.0	12.0
E-mail address on record (0=no, 1=yes)	43.1	56.9
University graduate degree only (0=no, 1=yes)	77.2	22.8
Employed as university faculty or staff (0=no, 1=yes)	96.6	3.4

dues-based alumni association student membership category with more than 1500 members in its overall population of 37084 dues-paying members at the time of the study, current students were excluded from this study as the purpose was to attain information related specifically to university graduates.

### Population characteristics

Before analyzing the data, the researcher first examined the descriptive statistics of the entire population of graduates of the university who were the subject of this study. Interval level variables appear in Table 1 and nominal level variables

appear in Tables 2 and 3. The researcher used SPSS version 17.0 for this and all analyses.

As can be seen in Table 1, the average amount of university giving was about \$1192. However, the distribution of this variable was positively skewed because the very large amounts of some giving totals caused the mean to be relatively high. The median and mode donation amounts were both \$0 because a large number of graduates did not donate any amount. When cases were selected of persons who gave a certain amount (that is, a donation greater than \$0), the average amount of university

**Table 3:** Percentages for categorical nominal level variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Member pay type (1= <i>not a member</i> , 2= <i>annual member</i> , 3= <i>life member</i> )	83.10	9.20	7.60
Sequence (1= <i>member first</i> , 2= <i>donor first</i> , 3= <i>not a donor member or data not available</i> )	9.40	8.80	81.80
Membership classification (1= <i>single member</i> , 2= <i>joint member</i> , 3= <i>not a member</i> )	6.10	10.80	83.10
Highest university degree (1= <i>bachelor's</i> , 2= <i>master's</i> , 3= <i>doctoral/professional</i> )	66.80	20.80	12.4

giving was \$3122, the mode was \$25 and the median was \$185. Thus, even for individuals who donated some amount, there was a skewed distribution, with large giving totals drawing the mean upward. The average age of persons in the dataset was about 45 years.

Table 2 shows the dichotomous variables. The table reveals that about 17 percent of persons in the dataset were current alumni association members, and slightly more than half of the population was male. About 56 percent were residents of the state of Kentucky and about 23 percent graduated from the university with a graduate degree only (that is, most persons received a bachelor's degree or a bachelor's degree in combination with another degree at the university).

As seen in Table 3, most individuals (over 80 percent) were not alumni association members. Consistent with the information in Table 2, the highest degree of most individuals was a bachelor's degree.

## ANALYSIS RESULTS

### Member by donor results

To address the first hypothesis that alumni association membership is

positively correlated with alumni giving, the researcher used a chi-square analysis procedure in the form of a 2x2 contingency table to examine the association between the nominal scaled variables related to alumni association membership and alumni giving. The researcher examined population data ( $N=156\,356$ ).

The researcher conducted several iterations of chi-square analysis to examine associations of donors and members among classifications such as member status (current or lapsed) and donor levels (a gift of any amount or 'fellows' status indicating total giving of more than \$10 000).

Regarding the alumni association membership variables, only individuals who were current or previous dues-paying members were counted in the analyses as current or lapsed members. For several years before 2003, the alumni association at the studied university provided a 1-year complimentary membership to new university graduates. Non-paid memberships were excluded from the analyses. Table 4 summarizes the definitions of member and donor that were used in the analyses.

The researcher first examined the relationship between alumni



**Table 4:** Description of member and donor variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>
Current member	University graduates who are current dues-paying members of the alumni association; either an annual member who is current on their annual membership payment, a life member on an installment plan who is current on their membership payment, or a life member whose membership is paid in full.
Current or previous member	All current alumni association members (see definition of current member) as well as university graduates who have previously been a dues-paying member of the alumni association.
Current donor	University graduates who have made a financial contribution of any amount to the university within the previous 12 months.
Current or previous donor	University graduates who have made a financial contribution of any amount to the university within any time since graduation.
Fellows donor	University graduates who have made total cumulative financial contributions to the university of at least \$10000.

association membership, including all current or previous members, and donor status, including all current or previous donors who had made a gift to the university at any time and of any amount. Table 5 summarizes this analysis.

Among current or previous alumni association members, 62.8 percent were current or previous donors and 37.2 percent were not current or previous donors. Among university graduates who had never been alumni association members, 26.7 percent were current or previous donors and 73.3 percent were not current or previous donors. Current or previous alumni association members were more than twice as likely (2.3 times) as non-members (26.7 percent versus 62.8 percent) to be current or previous donors:  $\chi^2(1, N=156296)=18730.25$ ,  $P<0.001$ . Current or previous member status was moderately correlated with

current or previous donor status, with an  $\Phi$  of 0.35.

The researcher next analyzed the associations between alumni association membership and alumni giving by looking at the relationships between current members and current donors. This included all active alumni association members who were either fully paid life members, life members on a payment plan who were current on their installment payments, and annual members who were current on their annual dues payment. 'Current' donor status applies to any donor who had made a gift of any amount to the university within 1 year before the time of data collection. The results are summarized in Table 6.

A chi-square analysis based upon current status for members and donors yielded the following results: Among alumni association members, 35.1 percent were current donors and 64.9

**Table 5:** Crosstabulation of current or previous member by current or previous donor

<i>Current or previous donor</i>	<i>Current or previous member</i>				$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>			
Yes	31 124	62.8%	28 508	26.7%	18 730.25*	0.35
No	18 402	37.2%	78 262	73.3%	—	—
Total	49 526	100%	106 770	100%	—	—

\* $P < 0.001$ .

**Table 6:** Crosstabulation of current member by current donor

<i>Current donor</i>	<i>Current member</i>				$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>			
Yes	9 260	35.1%	9 503	7.3%	16 061.91*	0.32
No	17 099	64.9%	120 494	92.7%	—	—
Total	26 359	100%	129 997	100%	—	—

\* $P < 0.001$ .

percent were not current donors, and among graduates who were not current alumni association members, 7.3 percent were current donors and 92.7 percent were not.

Current alumni association members were almost five times as likely (4.8 times) as non-members (7.3 percent versus 35.1 percent) to be current donors:  $\chi^2 (1, N=156\,356) = 16\,061.91, P < 0.001$ . When comparing the results of the analysis conducted based upon current member and donor status rather than current or previous status, the results differed significantly, particularly between the likelihood of giving from alumni association members versus non-members. Current member status correlated moderately with current donor status ( $\Phi = 0.32$ ).

For the final chi-square analysis to examine the relationship between

alumni giving and alumni association membership, the researcher evaluated current alumni association members and fellows donors. As can be seen in Table 7, among current members, 6.9 percent were fellows donors and 93.1 percent were not. Among university graduates who were not current alumni association members, 0.6 percent were fellows donors and 99.4 percent were not. Current alumni association members were 11.5 times more likely than non-members (0.6 percent versus 6.9 percent) to be fellows donors:  $\chi^2 (1, N=156\,296) = 5\,289.56, P < 0.001$ . The correlation between current membership and fellows donor status was small in magnitude ( $\Phi = 0.18$ ).

A comparison of results of the member by donor analyses can be seen in Table 8. In summation, university

**Table 7:** Crosstabulation of current member by fellows donor

<i>Fellows donor</i>	<i>Current member</i>				$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>			
Yes	1818	6.9%	791	0.6%	5289.56*	0.18
No	24505	93.1%	129182	99.4%	—	—
Total	26323	100%	129973	100%	—	—

\* $P < 0.001$ .**Table 8:** Comparison of member by donor results

<i>Member by donor comparison</i>	<i>Percentage of non-members who are donors (%)</i>	<i>Percentage of members who are donors (%)</i>	<i>Likelihood of a member being a donor versus a non-member being a donor</i>
Current or previous member by current or previous donor	26.7	62.8	2.3 times
Current member by current donor	7.3	35.1	4.8 times
Current member by fellows donor (> \$10000)	0.6	6.9	11.5 times

graduates who were members of the alumni association were significantly more likely to be donors to the university than non-members. Not only were members more likely to be donors, but they were more likely to donate higher values as indicated by results comparing alumni association membership and fellows donors. The most marked difference in giving between members and non-members can be seen from the relationship between current members and current fellows donors. University graduates who were current alumni association members were 11.5 times more likely than graduates who were not alumni association members to be fellows donors with a total university giving of at least \$10000.

### Donor by member results

In addition to examining the relationships between membership and donor status, with donor status as the dependent variable, the researcher also examined membership as the outcome variable to determine the likelihood of donors becoming members of the alumni association. This analysis used the same data as the previous analyses. Chi-square results were identical; however, percentages changed because now donor status was the independent variable and membership was the dependent variable. Table 9 summarizes the outcomes as percentages.

Just as university graduates who were alumni association members were more likely to be university donors

**Table 9:** Comparison of donor by member results

<i>Donor by member comparison</i>	<i>Percentage of non-donors who are members (%)</i>	<i>Percentage of donors who are members (%)</i>	<i>Likelihood of a donor being a member versus a non-donor being a member</i>
Current or previous donor by current or previous member	19.0	52.2	2.7 times
Current donor by current member	12.4	49.4	4.0 times
Current fellows donor (> \$10000) by current member	15.9	69.7	4.4 times

than non-members, university graduates who were donors were more likely to be alumni association members than were non-donors.

### **Time order of membership and giving**

During the literature review process, the researcher located only one study that specifically analyzed the relationship between alumni giving and alumni association membership (Patouillet, 2000). Although these findings indicated the existence of a relationship between membership and alumni giving, the study did not examine timing to determine which came first: the membership or the gift. Therefore, in addition to evaluating associations between alumni association membership and alumni giving among university graduates, the researcher also examined sequencing to obtain a better picture of this relationship.

Analyzing the dataset, which was representative of the entire population of university graduates, the researcher first identified cases that represented

individuals who were current or previous donors as well as current or previous alumni association members and who had the date of first paid membership and the date of the first university gift on record ( $N = 28\,452$ ). Next, the researcher looked at the date of first paid membership and date of first university gift to determine which occurred first among current or previous member donors. After assigning codes to the nominal level data, representing either member first or donor first, the researcher calculated descriptive statistics to measure the proportions. The results (Table 10) indicate that the slight majority of university graduates who were current or previous donor members with data on record (51.8 percent) became members of the alumni association before making their first gift to the university. There were a small number of cases (less than 100) in which a graduate made their first university gift on the same day as joining the alumni association. These cases were not included in this analysis.

**Table 10:** Sequencing of alumni association membership and giving

<i>Sequence</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Alumni association member first	—	—
Paid alumni association membership dues before making first gift to the university	14724	51.8
University donor first	—	—
Made university gift before making first payment for alumni association membership dues	13728	48.2
Total	28452	100

### Donor by membership type

The second hypothesis stated that the correlation between alumni giving and alumni association life membership is greater than the correlation between alumni giving and alumni association annual membership. To analyze this relationship, the researcher conducted chi-square procedures, this time using a 2×3 contingency table, and again used data pertaining to the entire population of graduates from the university studied ( $N=156\,356$ ).

The researcher's first iteration of chi-square measured the association between university graduates who were current donors, having made a gift of any amount within the prior year, and alumni association membership type: annual member, life member or not a member. Only current dues-paying alumni association members were used in the analysis. A summary of current donor by membership type appears in Table 11.

The results indicated that among current alumni association life members, 41.4 percent were current donors and 58.6 percent were not. Among current alumni association annual members, 29.9 percent were

current donors and 70.1 percent were not. Among university graduates who were not current alumni association members, 7.3 percent were current donors and 92.7 percent were not.

Current alumni association life members were 5.7 times more likely than non-members (7.3 percent versus 41.4 percent) to be current donors, and current alumni association annual members were 4.1 times more likely as non-members (7.3 percent versus 29.9 percent) to be current donors. Current alumni association life members were 1.4 times more likely than annual members (29.9 percent versus 41.1 percent) to be current donors:  $\chi^2(2, N=156\,356)=16884.93$ ,  $P<0.001$ . Current donor status was moderately correlated with membership type ( $\Phi=0.33$ ).

To evaluate the association between fellows donor status of university graduates (those who have at least \$10,000 in total university giving) and alumni association membership type among current members, the researcher again used a 2×3 chi-square contingency table. Within this analysis, and more so than all the other chi-square procedures, the resulting

**Table 11:** Crosstabulation of current donor by membership type

Current donor	Membership type						$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
	Annual member		Life member		Non-member			
Yes	4317	29.9%	4943	41.4%	9503	7.3%	16884.93*	0.33
No	10116	70.1%	6983	58.6%	120494	92.7%	—	—
Total	14433	100%	11926	100%	129997	100%	—	—

\* $P < 0.001$ .

**Table 12:** Crosstabulation of fellows donor by membership type

Fellows donor	Membership type						$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
	Annual member		Life member		Non-member			
Yes	399	2.8%	1419	11.9%	791	0.6%	8620.31*	0.24
No	14023	97.2%	10482	88.1%	129182	99.4%	—	—
Total	14422	100%	11901	100%	129973	100%	—	—

\* $P < 0.001$ .

differences were substantial. A summary of results from this analysis appears in Table 12.

Among current alumni association life members, 11.9 percent were fellows donors and 88.1 percent were not. Among current alumni association annual members, 2.8 percent were fellows donors and 97.2 percent were not. Among university graduates who were not current alumni association members, 0.6 percent were fellows donors and 99.4 percent were not. Current alumni association life members were 19.8 times more likely than non-members (0.6 percent versus 11.9 percent) to be fellows donors. Current alumni association annual members were 4.7 times more likely than non-members (0.6 percent versus 2.8 percent) to be fellows donors. Current alumni association life

members were 4.3 times more likely than annual members (2.8 percent versus 11.9 percent) to be fellows donors:  $\chi^2 (2, N = 156296) = 8620.31$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . The correlation between fellows donor status and membership type was small in magnitude ( $\Phi = 0.24$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The study's results supported both of the proposed hypotheses. Alumni association membership and alumni giving were correlated, and when looking specifically at these relationships across membership type, alumni association life membership was more strongly associated with alumni giving than alumni association annual membership.

Graduates who were alumni association members were significantly



more likely to be donors than non-members. Reciprocally, graduates who were donors were significantly more likely to be alumni association members than non-donors. Because of this theoretical 'chicken and egg' scenario, the researcher analyzed the sequencing of events among donors who were also members. The results revealed that slightly more graduates who were donors and members (51.8 percent) became members before making their first financial contribution to the university.

While this study cannot determine the causality of membership and giving, in that alumni association membership *leads* to alumni giving, its correlated relationship and fact that membership at the studied institution often occurred as the first step of alumni member donors before making a gift warrants further examination.

The most substantial difference between members and non-members existed within the relationship between current members and fellows donors (cumulative contributions greater than \$10 000). Current alumni association members were 11.5 times more likely

than non-members to be fellows donors.

Across membership types, life members were 1.4 times more likely than annual members to be current donors. When comparing life member donors to non-member donors, the difference was greater, as life members were 5.7 times more likely than non-members to be current donors. Annual members were 4.1 times more likely than non-members to be current donors. The difference in magnitude of likelihood was most significant among membership type and fellows donor status. Life members were 4.3 times more likely than annual members and 19.8 times more likely than non-members to be fellows donors. Annual members were 4.7 times more likely than non-members to be fellows donors. A summary comparison of donor-by-member results appears in Table 13.

These findings support the anecdotal assertion that alumni association members who are not currently donors are excellent prospects for alumni giving. Conversely, alumni donors who are not currently alumni association

**Table 13:** Comparison of donor by membership type results

	<i>Current donor (%)</i>	<i>Fellows donor (%)</i>
Percentage of current non-members who are donors	7.3	0.6
Percentage of current annual members who are donors	29.9	2.8
Percentage of current life members who are donors	41.1	11.9
Likelihood of current life members donating versus non-members	5.7 times	19.8 times
Likelihood of current annual members donating versus non-members	4.1 times	4.7 times
Likelihood of current life members donating versus current annual members	1.4 times	4.3 times

members are excellent prospects for membership.

## IMPLICATIONS

Alumni association membership professionals and university fundraisers can use information gleaned from this study to more effectively target alumni prospects. For instance, alumni association professionals can specifically send a membership appeal to alumni who are non-members but who are also financial contributors to the university and likely realize a much higher response rate than a solicitation mailed to non-members who are not donors. From the development side of university advancement operations, a fundraiser can send an alumni giving mailing to graduates who not donors but who are alumni association members and likely achieve a better return than an appeal sent to non-donors who are also not alumni association members. The ability to target membership and giving appeals to a specific subset of the alumni population allows these professionals to more effectively maximize their marketing dollars and realize a higher rate of return and lower cost per dollar raised.

This study might also help university advancement professionals realize the importance of dues-based alumni association membership models. While this study cannot determine the causality of membership in relation to alumni giving, it certainly raises some interesting questions about this relationship. Some might argue that alumni association membership is complementary to alumni giving and could even be perceived as a gateway to future giving. Before eschewing dues-based membership models,

university decision-makers would be well served to examine the findings of this study, and conduct similar analyses at their own institutions.

Implications from this research also extend to the field of academic research, as this study can aid researchers in additional studies of alumni association membership, particularly in regard to its relationship with alumni giving, which is important given the limited existence of similar research. Replication studies, specifically those conducted across multiple institutions, could provide additional insight.

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