Editorial

Compared with the central role institutional advancement plays in colleges and universities, the research literature is limited. Few studies in the fund-raising literature concentrate on basic research or theory building. Additionally, institutional advancement receives scant attention from higher education researchers. The lack of attention to institutional advancement may be due to several factors.

First, individuals pursuing doctorates who write dissertations focused on advancement frequently return to the world of practice rather than pursuing careers as faculty members. Their area of inquiry is driven by professional interests rather than by a program of research. As a result, the body of knowledge is fragmented, lacking many studies for the purpose of theory building.

Second, colleges and universities may be reluctant to share information with researchers for the fear of jeopardizing relationships with potential donors or alumni. As a result researchers may have difficulty gaining access to those populations necessary for understanding more fully the relationships that make fund raising possible within higher education.

Third, many advancement practitioners themselves see limited utility for research in their jobs. Fund raisers report that the knowledge they use in doing their duties as development officers is primarily general knowledge which is best learned on the job rather than in formal educational settings. There is no theoretical knowledge base specific to fund raising or advancement in which a majority of practitioners are well versed.

Finally, higher education faculty who actively pursue research on advancement-related topics as a part of their programs of research are limited in number.

Additionally, few programs include advancement courses as part of their higher education curriculum. Vanderbilt's four-course specialization in institutional advancement is unique among higher education programs; however, it is designed primarily for practitioners and senior administrators, not aspiring researchers.

However, with the increasingly important role of advancement activities in higher education institutions, a need exists for additional scholarly work which adds to the knowledge base that informs advancement practice. Beyond encouraging basic research focused on building theory, practitioners must integrate and apply theories from the literature to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their advancement operations.

The readers of *IJE*, who comprise a community of consumers and producers of advancement research, play an important role in encouraging new research and disseminating current best practices among members of the profession. As opinion leaders for the profession we should:

- encourage colleagues to become consumers of research by sharing relevant and important scholarly articles with them;
- strive to create a cadre of scholar/practitioners within our professional staffs;

- support graduate students interested in pursuing basic research focused on advancement;
- integrate data-driven decision making into advancement programs that are theoretically driven and that might be analyzed to replicate previous studies;
- cooperate with campus researchers to examine our alumni populations and donor databases;
- encourage additional study among younger staff members to help build professionalism and an appreciation of the role of theory in the practice of alumni relations, fund raising, and public relations;
- demand that professional training seminars and conference presentations are supported by rigorous research rather than anecdotal evidence or individual experience.

As we grow our knowledge base and increase expectations for practitioner familiarity with the literature, we raise the prospect of increasing returns on institutional investments in advancement operations; we increase the likelihood of developing testable theories, generalizable across institutional types, which explain giving behaviors; and we move advancement along the continuum of professionalism toward the “true” professions.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the Journal.

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