Behavioral Characteristics of Higher Education Fund-raisers

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Abstract

Worth and Asp (1995) identified four characteristic roles that are likely to be engaged by higher education fund-raisers: salesperson, catalyst, manager, and leader. In this study, a questionnaire was designed to elicit the level of importance that development officers, place in each of the four roles. One hundred and seventy-nine randomly selected development officers at US colleges and universities responded to the questionnaire. Statistical analysis revealed acceptable levels of reliability for all four of the behavioral roles included in the questionnaire. No significant differences were, however, observed between the mean rating scores for any of the four roles. It appears that a broad range of behavioral roles is expected of fund-raisers. Fund-raisers are likely to adapt a behavioral role depending to suit the fund-raising activity engaged. The role of the higher education fund-raiser involves significant shifts in personal

and behavioral styles depending on the nature of the fund-raising project. The current study indicates the need for diverse experience in the pre-professional and in-service training of higher education fund-raisers.

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Introduction

In the last two decades the profession of fund raising in higher education has emerged as a major force on American campuses. In both private and public institutions highly visible resources of personnel, time, and space have been invested in the processes associated with seeking nontuition-based funds to support the mission of institutions of higher education. Most large institutions have well-organized development/advancement offices with at least one and often multiple persons employed in each of the ten or more distinct fund-raising functions. Even in the smallest colleges at least one

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position is designated as the vice-president/director of development with responsibility for coordinating institutional advancement efforts.

At least several major organizations are dedicated to the professional interests of development/advancement officers. Among those organizations most visible are The American Society of Higher Education (ASHE), The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), and The National Society of Fund Raising Executives (NSFRE). Those organizations maintain staffs, hold annual conventions, and support publications and other programs. The most visible publication dedicated to the interests of fund-raising personnel is the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. A number of universities in the United States have developed programs in the field of higher education advancement/development functions. The programs at Harvard University and The University of Chicago are examples of continuing education curricula specifically geared for the needs of fund-raisers in higher education.

In traditionally organized institutions of higher education, the vice-president/director of development/advancement works closely with the president or chancellor of the institution. The president is typically the central figure who determines the organization, leadership, and specific personnel composition of the development advancement team (Cook and Lasher, 1996). In the last decade, college and university administrators have been faced with the steady decrease in governmental and state support of all kinds. At the same time administrators have been faced with steady increases in expenses. As a result the

development/advancement function has achieved a vital role in the environment of higher education. The personal and behavioral characteristics of the individuals vested with development/advancement responsibilities in higher education are among the important variables that help to determine the success of development/advancement programs. The purpose of this research will be to explore some of the behavioral and functional characteristics of successful development officers.

Review of Literature

The body of research regarding fund raising is growing. The literature includes articles tracing the history of fund raising, those depicting the organization and functions of fund-raising units, and those focusing on specific variables related to fund raising.

Lukomski and Herrman (1996) place the origins of fund raising in higher education with the founding of the first universities in the United States. For generations the responsibility was primarily in the hands of the president and trustees. The term "development" emerged in relation to US universities in the 1920s. It was not until the 1940s that separate fund-raising offices were established as a part of university administration. Through an analysis of previous research, Lukomski and Herrman indicate that the desirable characteristics of higher education fund-raising personnel are similar to the characteristics of successful fund-raising personnel in other nonprofit organizations. Integrity, enthusiasm, creativity, and the capacity to inspire confidence are among the most desired characteristics.

A comprehensive survey of higher education fund-raising research to date was presented in a paper by Brittingham and Pezzullo (1989). The authors focus on the characteristics of donor behavior and introduce some of the ethical issues involved in the business of higher education fund raising. In another paper, the same authors (Brittingham and Pezzullo, 1990) note the spread of fund raising in higher education from the private college sector to the public university section. The authors note that in all types of institutions fund raising has moved from a peripheral to a central institutional activity. They make the observation that the more dollars spent on fund-raising efforts, the more money raised. Further, they specify some of the ethical dilemmas that higher education fund-raisers are likely to encounter. Finally, the authors specify further needs for research in the arena of higher education advancement/development.

Basic to development/advancement efforts is the concept of voluntary support. That concept has been explored in relation to a number of functional and personnel variables (Duronio, 1988). Bauer (1993) provided a primer for fund-raising personnel defining the field with focus on staffing and methods used to develop a fund-raising plan.

Miller and Seagren (1992) conducted research regarding the traits sought in the hiring of development officers. Their study included a content analysis of descriptors used in 307 job opening advertisements which appeared in publications of the NSFRE and other sources from 1988 to 1990. Their study recognized the importance of "trade skills" as well as office-

related skills integrated with practical work experience. Formal education in fund raising was not identified as a major qualification in their study.

A least one study (Duronio and Loessin, 1990) explored the systems used by higher education fund-raising offices in relation to success in fund raising. That study affirmed the importance of both the roles of president and trustees in the institutional advancement activities. In a doctoral research study, Willard (1985) focused on the characteristics of individuals likely to be successful in fund raising. His review of the literature revealed 20 characteristics divided among educational factors, social factors, and general factors. All the characteristics were in the realm of previous experience or background variables. His survey study revealed only three of the 20 identified characteristics as having a significant relationship with indicators of success in fund raising. Those variables were age, years of work experience, and years of advancement experience. His findings were qualified due to a low percentage of variation attributed to the significantly correlated variables.

Worth and Asp (1995) postulated that the role of the development officer in higher education has been characterized in the literature as falling into four schools of thought. Some authors interpret the development officer as a "salesperson" with a primary function as a solicitor of gifts. Other authors interpret the role of the development officer as that of a "catalyst," an individual who works behind the scenes in support of university officers and other involved in fund-raising activities. The third categorical function is that of the

“manager.” In the role of manager the development officer’s skills as an internal organizer are emphasized. Finally, the role of the development officer as a “leader” is postulated to include advancement officers whose voice is engaged in major institutional policy beyond the realm of fund raising. The four roles are postulated as centering around two vectors. Perceived as overlapping entities, the two vectors include internal and external development functions.

Research methodology exploring fund-raising variables and other higher education development activities has taken a variety of paths. Most studies tend to be in the realm of theoretical observation with few studies resulting from the systematic collection of data from higher education fund-raising personnel. Among the systematic data-oriented studies, the study conducted by Felicetti (1989) accessed the opinions of a group of leading fund-raising consulting firms to explore the integration of the academic personnel, specifically the academic vice-president in the fund-raising process. The research of Miller and Seagren (1992) gathered data from an analysis of job opening advertisements. The studies conducted by Duronio and Loessin (1990) and Duronio (1988) constitute the most systematically planned and comprehensive examination of variables relative to fund raising. Only one study (Willard, 1985) utilized a survey technique to explore characteristics of successful fund-raisers.

There is a need for further systematic research to explore variables related to the success of fund-raising professionals. The Worth and Asp (1995) theoretical framework provides

an appropriate starting point. Through a theoretical study the authors identified current behavioral characteristics of fund-raisers. There is a need for further exploration of the four functional roles of fund-raisers. It will be the purpose of the current study to extend the theoretical formulations of Worth and Asp to the level of systematic survey research.

Methodology

An original survey was constructed for this research project. The survey’s format included three response sections introduced by a brief directions section. One of the response sections dealt with characteristic functions of successful development officers in higher education. The second section of the survey elicited the respondent’s level of involvement in 10 institutional advancement activities. The third section simply elicited the current job title of the respondent.

The first section of the survey included a list of 20 descriptors associated with each of the four behavioral roles of the higher education development officer as postulated by Worth and Asp (1995). For each of the roles of “salesperson,” “catalyst,” “manager”, and “leader,” five one word or short phrase descriptors were incorporated into the questionnaire. The descriptors were primarily derived from Worth and Asp’s (1995) narrative regarding the four behavioral roles of fund-raisers. In addition, some of the descriptors were derived from definitions and synonyms of the roles detailed by Worth and Asp. Each descriptor was followed by a five-point Likert Scale. Respondents were instructed to circle the appropriate number to indicate the

level that each of the descriptors applied in the function of successful development officers in higher education. The survey was clearly marked to indicate that a rating of "1" meant that the descriptor "has minimal application," and a rating of "5" meant that the descriptor "has much application."

The second section of the survey included 10 items pertaining to the level of involvement in the array of higher education advancement activities. The 10 areas were as follows: "annual appeal," "major gifts," "deferred/planned giving," "capital campaign," "foundation grants," "corporate grants," "government grants," "alumni affairs," "public relations" and "publications." Each of the activities was followed by a five-point Likert Scale. Respondents were instructed to rate their current level of involvement ranging from a rating of "1" to indicate "low involvement" to a rating of "5" to indicate "high involvement" in each of the higher education institutional advancement activities.

The third section of the survey included eight job titles generally associated with higher education institutional advancement functions. Respondents were instructed to indicate which one of the eight job titles was closest to their current job title. The eight job titles included the following: "vice president for development/advancement," "assistant or associate vice president for development/advancement," "director of development," "assistant or associate director of development/advancement," "grant writer," "development officer," "development assistant," and "development associate."

The one-page survey was mailed to potential respondents with a cover letter. The cover letter briefly explained the researcher's background and the general purpose of the survey. It requested the cooperation of the recipient and provided orientation regarding the informed consent procedure engaged. It also provided instruction for respondents who desired to receive feedback regarding the results of the survey. An addressed and stamped envelope was enclosed with the cover letter and questionnaire for the respondent to return the completed survey.

Three hundred and thirteen surveys were mailed to the "Vice President of Development/Advancement" at institutions of higher education in the United States. The names of the institutions targeted for inclusion in the sample were generated using random numbers applied to an internet published and numbered list of United States senior colleges and universities. One hundred and seventy-nine questionnaires were completed and returned.

Results

Statistical analyses of the resulting questionnaire data were conducted first to examine the reliability of the survey instrument. Further statistical analyses explored relationships and interactions of Worth and Asp's (1995) four roles of fund-raisers in higher education along with the variable of level of involvement in several specific areas of fund raising. Additional analysis examined the position of the respondent in relation to both the perceived role and the level of involvement in the specific areas of fund raising in higher education. The

data were analyzed on the basis of 179 completed and returned surveys. For the specific statistical procedures, the “N” varies because some respondents did not respond to all of the survey items. The statistical procedures used accommodated for respondent omissions.

Acceptable levels of reliability were revealed for all four of the behavioral roles associated with successful development officers in higher education. The data show that the questionnaire instrument is reliable. The alpha reliabilities are as follows:

Role	Alpha reliability coefficient	N
Salesperson	0.63	155
Catalyst	0.69	142
Manager	0.67	161
Leader	0.65	160

In the first section of the survey for the behavioral characteristics of successful development officers in higher education, the data ranged from a low mean rating of 3.25 ($N=165$; $SD=0.99$) for the “solicitous” descriptor to a high mean rating of 4.61 ($N=170$; $SD=0.60$) for the “creates connections” descriptor. Tests for significance of difference between means did not yield any significant difference between the mean ratings of any of the survey, descriptors.

For the data in the second section of the survey the mean ratings of level of involvement in the various activities related to fund raising ranged from a low of 3.08 ($N=170$; $SD=1.07$) for “publications” to a high of 4.74 ($N=171$; $SD=0.59$) for “major gifts.”

Discussion

The data support the existence of the factors postulated by Worth and Asp (1995). The roles of manager, catalyst, leader, and salesperson each appear to hold together well as demonstrated by the questionnaire data. The lack of a significant difference between any of the four roles affirms that there is a broad spectrum of functional roles expected in higher education advancement professionals. The current researcher suspects that differences in the preferred roles may emerge if the type of school is examined. For example, development officers at small liberal arts colleges might manifest a preference for roles different from those of officers at large state universities. In the current study such calculations were not conducted. In anticipation that such data might be needed in the future, the researcher did, however, code the response sheets so that at a later date the data might be examined in groups representing specific kinds of higher education environments (e.g., large state universities, small private liberal arts colleges, Catholic institutions, and etc.).

The lack of a significant difference between any of the four factors attests to the range of roles and personality/behavioral variables that might be present in successful higher education fund-raisers. It appears that across a wide range of institutional types and sizes, there is no tendency for any one of the four fund-raiser roles to be given more value by the respondents.

Additional analysis of the data needs to be conducted to further analyze the four roles in relation to specific types of institutions (e.g., large state universities vs. small private liberal

arts colleges). Additional research and data collection should be accomplished to examine Worth and Asp's (1995) four roles in relation to involvement in the two vectors of external and internal development function. The 10 advancement/development roles included in the second part of the survey form utilized in the current research might be analyzed further in relation to the roles to discern if any relationship exists.

Of the returned surveys, 73 requested a summary of the results of the study. Anecdotal data were tabulated regarding the number of women respondents. This data came from the names indicated on the response sheets by the 73 respondents who requested a report regarding the results of this research study. Excluded from consideration were the several names indicated with initials only and several who did not include a name asking that the results be sent to a titled position. Fifty-six names were indicated that clearly identified the respondents by gender. Of that group, 42.9 percent were women and 57.1 percent were men. It does appear that among the ranks of higher education

fund raising there remains a greater number of men.

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