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2021

An Exploratory Comparative Case Study of Successful Fundraising Operations at Three Small, Private, Christian Universities

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An Exploratory Comparative Case Study of Successful Fundraising Operations

at Three Small, Private, Christian Universities

by
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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

St. Paul, MN
2021

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Abstract

Literature suggests that the challenges currently facing higher education will continue, increasing the pressure on institutions to discover and cultivate new funding sources outside of the traditional avenues of tuition, room, board, and fees. Through an exploratory comparative case study research design, the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, faith-based institutions that have proven successful, as measured by their current *U.S. News & World Report* and Forbes financial ratings, were examined through individual interviews with six employees at each of these three institutions, including the president, vice president of development, senior development staff members and university trustees. The conceptual framework used for the study was relational management. Emerging themes reflect the characteristics common among successful fundraising operations; those themes include a focus on vision and mission, use of the university president, stewardship practices, storytelling and communication, use of systems, data, and metrics, and a focus on relationship building. These findings suggest that an organization's focus on these key themes can positively impact fundraising activities to help ensure financial viability for the university and its programs.

Acknowledgements

I bow before my King in thanks for His leading in my life. God is the center of all I do and this dissertation has been written in honor of Him. I am also thankful for the many friends, colleagues, and family members who have walked this journey with me.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the loving support of my wife Rachelle. This project is dedicated to her, my six children – Justin, Kristin, Lindsey, Landon, Whitney, and Joe – who stood beside me during the many days I had to stay in an office working on this project instead of engaging with them and their families. I also thank my grandchildren – Skylar, Asher, August Lane, Nolan, Luke, Bronson, Micah, and Jackson – for understanding when "Bumpa" had to work on the computer. I love you all and thank you for your patience.

I received professional support in so many ways. Dr. Matt Hill encouraged me to complete a doctorate in education many years ago. I am not sure what he saw in me, but thank you, Matt. Dr. Jay Barnes, thank you for reminding me that, "it's not about brilliance, it's about persistence." Well, I did it! Dr. Jessica Daniels, the most incredible colleague, friend, and dissertation chair anyone could imagine, thank you for your hours of help, encouragement, and wisdom. I have so much respect for you. Dr. Amy Bragg Carey and Dr. Scott Moats, thank you for being my readers and pushing me to think more broadly. I thank God for your discernment.

Finally, I would like to thank the many fundraising and higher education professionals interviewed for this project. Your commitment to Christian higher education and your excellence in philanthropic work motivates me in my development efforts and made this research valuable to our industry. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Enrollment is falling, deficits are increasing, and small, private colleges and universities are closing (Eide, 2018). The dire forecasts made by Moody's Investor Services and other credit organizations predicting the failure of significant numbers of small higher education institutions after the financial downturn of 2008-2009 seem to be coming true (Eide, 2018). Adding to the precarious situation, a worldwide pandemic struck in March 2020 causing further financial challenges as many colleges and universities experienced decreased gift revenue and budget reductions due to decreased revenue overall (Marts & Lundy, 2020).

Small, private schools with modest endowments and limited donor capacity are feeling the pressure of price-savvy families and tightening margins as institutional expenses outpace tuition revenue (Papandrea, 2015; Prior, 2017; Weisbrod & Asch, 2010). A survey of business officers from colleges and universities reported that 40% of those surveyed considered their discount rate (i.e., the amount of institutional dollars awarded to students in the form of grants and scholarship as a percentage of total tuition and fees collected each year) to be unsustainable (Eide, 2018; NACUBO, 2018). Further, polling of a similar population showed that only 42% of chief business officers believed their institutions had financial viability over the next 10 years (Jones & Johnstone, 2016).

Challenges to the small, private college and university landscape pose a sobering question: Can small, private colleges with modest endowments and prestige survive the next decade? If colleges are to survive, what will be required to maintain financial viability? Fundraising has been essential to higher education since colonial times (Drezner, 2011). According to Drezner, no other single factor has impacted higher education more than philanthropy. Today, schools rely on fundraising to help bridge the funding gap between tuition

revenue and total college operating costs (Shaker & Nathan, 2017). With this focus on the need for philanthropic support, higher education institutions require successful fundraising operations to ensure the necessary funding for their institutions.

Hank Russo, founder of the Fund Raising School at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) stated, "People don't give to people, but to people with good causes" (IUPUI – The Fund Raising School, 2019, p. 32). The goal of fundraising is to build a constituency of supporters who believe in the mission of the organization and are willing to invest in its future (Greenfield, 2002). To do this effectively, institutions employ professionals tasked with discovering and soliciting gifts from donors in support of the school's mission. The work of these fundraisers is essential to a university's future.

Philanthropy includes both process and practice, which delineate the purpose for philanthropy and the specific ways in which fundraising is conducted (Greenfield, 2002). Many Researchers have highlighted the importance of tools, systems, and data as essential to an effective fundraising operation (Durango-Cohen & Balasubramanian, 2015; Polonsky & Sargeant, 2007; Slover-Linett & Stoner, 2013). Many nonprofit organizations use donor relationship management tools often referred to as customer relationship management (CRM) databases, to manage donor research, contacts, and gift tracking (Tempel, 2003). CRM tools provide technology to assist in effective completion of philanthropic work.

Greenfield (2002) and Tempel (2003) both acknowledged the value of tools, systems, and data, but also emphasized the need for relationships as the basis for fundraising. The ability to engage current and prospective donors is essential, as philanthropy requires fundraisers to possess a good sense of interpersonal communication and an ability to connect donor interest

with organizational opportunities allowing for the engagement of prospective donors (Shaker &

Nathan, 2017; Warwick, 2014).

What makes some fundraising operations more successful than others? Is there a specific

process, tool, or system used by some small, private Christian universities that make them more

successful than others in the fundraising process? Does the process of relationship building make

a difference in the success of fundraising? Research is needed to explore the attributes of

successful and effective fundraising strategies found in small, private Christian universities to

determine if there are fundraising methods that similar schools might use to enhance fundraising,

particularly as those methods apply to increasing donor affinity and attaining increased donor

gifts.

Statement of the Problem

Currently, the higher education situation is tumultuous, with ever-increasing financial

challenges (Chabotar, 2010; Eide, 2018; Lederman, 2018). Eide (2018) cited the small school

closure report from Moody's Investor Services, which sounded an alarm regarding the broken

nature of higher education financial models and, more specifically, the ability to operate in a

rapidly evolving environment. Hiles (2010) posited that due to increasing financial challenges,

colleges and universities were making drastic budget cuts. He further explained that the financial

struggles were forcing institutions to reevaluate their operational structures and programs, while

cultivating private donor gifts to pay for new programs.

Small, private colleges and universities are particularly vulnerable to higher education

financial conditions. Most small, private colleges are highly dependent on tuition revenue and

have few financial reserves to respond to financial challenges (Carey, 2014). In recent years,

73% of small, private schools reported net tuition had fallen, or in best case scenarios, remained

flat (Selingo, 2013). Selingo also noted this net revenue challenge limited institutional ability to meet operational obligations, increase revenue streams, or increase programmatic offerings.

In a New York Times interview, John C. Nelson, managing director of higher education and health care practice at Moody's Investor Services, cited significant challenges for the higher education industry, in particular its inability to grow revenue as it had done over the past 20 years (Selingo, 2013). Nelson's research found small, private schools were particularly vulnerable as they attempted to respond to adverse technological, demographic, and economic conditions, placing them on a financially unsustainable path (Selingo, 2013; Seltzer, 2017).

Funding mechanisms and sources of higher education revenue impact college and university pricing. Most state-sponsored schools receive government support through tax revenue to provide supplementary funding for institutional operations (Barr, 2002). The ability for public institutions to receive state funding, in comparison to private schools' ineligibility for the same funding, creates disequilibrium in revenue sources needed for institutional operation (Rine & Guthrie, 2016). The funding differential places private schools at a distinct disadvantage, creating the need to find alternative funding sources.

This funding discrepancy is also reflected in tuition pricing (Kerr, 2019). In the 2019-2020 school year, the average sticker price for private education was approximately 73% more than public institutions (Powell & Kerr, 2019). The difference between published public and private institutions is significant, with average in-state tuition and fees for public institutions at nearly $10,000 annually, compared with $35,000 at private colleges and universities (Pryor, 2017). Could the shifting demographics of students bypassing costlier private institutions in favor of public universities be adding to the financial challenges of small, private institutions reliant on tuition revenue for a significant portion of their income?

A declining population of college eligible students posed another significant challenge to higher education (Seltzer, 2017). Grawe (2018) reported on the nationwide reduction in fertility rates in the United States, which coincided with the economic crisis of 2008-2010, resulting in a 15% negative deviation compared to the peak birth rate of 2007. Grawe also highlighted the changing demographics in the United States, including a shift in state populations. The predicted change in demographics – relative to birth rates – indicated a significant decline in college-ready students in much of the Midwest, Northeast, and Northwest regions of the country. Grawe (2018) surmised that colleges and universities located in regions with shrinking student prospects would face increased financial challenges as the number of potential students contracted.

Purpose of the Study

Because of the increasing need for donations/fundraising as a revenue source to close the current budget gap, the purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private Christian universities that have proven to be successful, as measured by the size of their endowment, the success of their most recent fundraising campaigns, and their annual fundraising performance. The hope is that strategies identified at these three participating institutions may be replicated by other small, private Christian universities, thereby improving their fundraising capacity. This research was conducted from the viewpoint of the chief advancement officer for a small, private, Christian university through observation and analysis of three faith-based institutions that appear to have successful fundraising operations.

Research Question

An explorative comparative case study research design was used to examine the advancement departments of three small, private Christian universities. Data collection included interviews with the university president, senior development professionals and members of the institution's Board of Trustees. Institutional data related to annual fundraising goals, endowment goals, annual development plans, site-specific programs, structures, processes, technologies, and strategies was also examined in an effort to identify characteristics that may account for the success of the departments.

The following research question was explored: What are the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, faith-based institutions that have proven successful, as measured by their current *U.S. News & World Report* and Forbes financial ratings?

Significance of the Study

The challenging higher education financial climate negatively impacts the sustainability of many small, private universities (O'Carroll, 2019; Selingo, 2013; Weisbrod & Asch, 2010). Institutions struggle to fund operations; tuition revenue continues to decline due to demographic challenges, and economic turbulence and a worldwide pandemic affect endowments (Friga, 2020). Identifying successful fundraising models and strategies may assist other smaller private Christian universities impacted by financial stressors as systems and ideas are emulated, leading to improved fundraising results.

Philanthropic research has examined many aspects of the fundraising process. However, to date, clarity has not yet emerged as to the value of specific systems, factors, or processes that might impact successful fundraising (Blansett, 2015; Hiles, 2010; Hogan, 2012; Sargeant & Shang, 2016). Due to the small size of private Christian colleges and universities, compared to

more prestigious and larger private institutions and public universities, the examination of fundraising operations at small, private Christian colleges and universities has received minimal study. In order to fill the gap in research, the operations of fundraising teams at three small, private Christian universities was explored to determine the systems, processes, strategies, technologies, and programs used to achieve successful fundraising outcomes.

Definition of Terms

Several terms used most frequently throughout this dissertation study are defined in this section:

Annual Fund

A fund serving as a building block for all fundraising, creating a base of donors giving to a particular cause. Individuals are normally the principle donors to these funds (Rosso, 2003).

Campaign

A carefully organized and highly structured fundraising program designed to raise funds for a specific cause, program, or facility over a specified period of time (Rosso, 2003).

Endowment

Principle funding maintained in a permanent account that provides on-going revenue to an institution through earned income or interest revenue (Archibald & Feldman, 2011).

Higher Education

Education beyond the secondary level and usually meaning university or college education (Miriam-Webster, n.d.).

Major gifts

A significant monetary gift given for an organization's goals. This term may also define a department within fundraising (Rosso, 2003).

Philanthropy

Voluntary action of giving to or association with an organization. Often used to define the act of giving (Rosso, 2003).

Planned Giving

A form of gift given by a donor during their lifetime or as a gift available to the individual or organization at a prescribed time in the future. This may include estate plans, usually upon death and in testament (Rosso, 2003).

Prospect

An individual who is likely to be interested in the organization or cause but has not made a contribution (Rosso, 2003).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 is a literature review examining topics impacting institutional funding sources, the stressors to those sources, and fundraising. Chapter 3 provides the methodology for the study, including the research question, research design, theoretical overview for the study, methodologies, data review, and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and Chapter 5 provides conclusions and recommendations for practice and also recommendations for future research based on the dissertation findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The higher education landscape is changing. As more institutions face uncertain financial challenges and struggle to survive, the long-term viability of colleges and universities is in question (Jones & Johnstone, 2016; Selingo 2013). University expenses continue to grow while revenue streams, mainly in the form of tuition and fees, are stagnant or declining (Selingo, 2013). Small, private universities are in an even more challenging dilemma, operating on tight margins without the benefit of government funding (O'Carroll, 2019). Lederman (2018), citing the Inside Higher Education's 2018 Study of College and University Business Officers, reported that 56% of private college and universities believed their school's financial model to be unsustainable.

A study of the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, faith-based institutions that have proven successful will provide the opportunity to discover strategies, processes, programs, technological tools, and training methods that other institutions can replicate to experience similar success.

Traditional Higher Education Revenue Sources

Colleges and universities receive their funding from several sources, including tuition, room, and board collected from students, state and local appropriations, private gifts and endowments, state and local grants, federal appropriations and grants, and auxiliary income (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016). Generally, state and local appropriations comprise the largest revenue category for public institutions, while private schools rely on tuition as their largest revenue source (Wellman et al., 2008).

Public Institution Funding

The financial situation of large public universities is significantly different than that of small, private institutions. General subsidies from state government help off-set institutional costs; however, in recent years these subsidies have been decreasing (Archibald & Feldman, 2011). In some cases, such as community colleges, public school income may also be supplemented by county or municipal government agencies (Barr & McClellan, 2018). Further, addition funding to large schools for the purpose of conducting research, known as R1 institutions, also provides significant income (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016).

Private Institution Funding

Most small, private institutions are tuition dependent, with only a few benefitting from large endowments (Koenig, 2016). These endowment funds offset operational costs that are not covered by student tuition dollars and fees. In 2017, three of the five highest endowed institutions were private schools including Harvard University with over $37 billion-dollars, Yale University nearing $30 billion, and Princeton University with an endowment of nearly $25 billion-dollars (Koenig, 2016). The revenue generated from these endowments provides a cushion, making them less dependent on tuition revenue.

Small, Private Tuition-Dependent Institution Funding

Small, private, tuition-dependent schools without large endowments generally rely on tuition, room, and board to cover two-thirds of their annual revenue needs (Chabotar, 2010). Noble (2020) reported that small Christian colleges and universities relied on tuition payments for roughly 80% of their annual revenue. Wellman et. al (2008) stated that tuition was the major revenue source for private institutions, surpassing $20,000 annually. Exacerbating the situation, Pryor (2017) reported private institution tuition increasing on average from less than $20,000 in

1990 to more than an average of nearly $35,000 in 2017. Desrochers and Hurlburt (2016) reported that private institutions relied on tuition revenue, not receiving benefits from state appropriations as received by public institutions. This reality created an imbalance between the revenue available to public schools compared to private institutions. This gap between revenues and expenses require these schools to rely on other sources of income, including fundraising from private donors, foundations, and corporations (Archibald & Feldman, 2011; Barr & McClellan, 2018).

Financial Stressors Impacting Traditional Higher Education Revenue Sources

The economic recession of 2008-2009 had a significant impact on higher education. Jones and Johnstone (2016) stated that the financial crisis impacted the affordability of higher education. A 2018 survey of college and university business officers showed that only 44% of chief financial officers had confidence in the stability of their institutions'10-year financial model (Lederman, 2018). The 2019-2020 Best College report ("U.S. News Best Colleges," n.d.) stated that educational costs were increasing an average of between 3-4% for the 2019 school year. Overall, educational costs expenses are significantly outpacing revenue increases and creating challenges for the higher education industry (Chabotar, 2010; Eide, 2018; Jones & Johnstone, 2016). Supporting this assertion, Moody's Investor Services (as cited in Seltzer, 2017) reported small tuition-dependent colleges and universities were at highest risk due to increasing financial uncertainty.

The recession of 2008 left many middle-class families with less wealth and a growing concern for escalating college costs and associated tuition, room, and board expenses (Selingo, 2013). After a decade of financial challenges, many colleges and universities explored new funding sources and operational cost cutting (Fischer, 2011; Jones & Wellman, 2010; Pryor,

2017; Seltzer, 2017). Weisbrod and Asch (2010) noted that falling investment values, tightening credit lines, and declining donor contributions also added to the challenging conditions facing higher education.

The recession was one in a series of challenges creating the perfect storm of financial uncertainty for colleges and universities (Papendrea, 2015; Weisbrod & Asch, 2010). Institutions were also negatively impacted by demographic changes (Grawe, 2019). Research indicated that domestic migration in the early- to mid-2010s increased population numbers in the United States South and West regions and diminished traditional higher education markets in the Northeast and Midwest (Grawe, 2019). The phenomena of domestic immigration as evidenced by the movement of large populations of American citizen to the South and Western states was but one of the challenges impacting higher education. According to Grawe (2019), adding to the challenge of domestic immigration is the fertility crisis sparked by the 2008-2010 recession, which saw United States fertility rates drop by nearly 10%. The reduction of college-age students will impact the tuition revenue potential of colleges and universities as they compete for fewer tuition paying students.

Colleges, and in particular private colleges located in the Midwest United States, are not an exception to these trends and are under pressure resulting from declining enrollment and difficulties with fundraising. Enrollment growth was projected at 1% in 2017; however, 61% of Midwest schools instead reported declining enrollment numbers that were significantly higher than those in other geographic regions of the country (Seltzer, 2017). Decreased enrollment equates to decreased tuition revenue needed by small, private institutions.

Perry (2014) provided an equally ominous report about the characteristics of post-recession donors. According to Perry, post-recession donors have much lower organizational

trust levels than they did prior to the recession, and donors now require organizations to demonstrate trustworthiness and credibility in order to receive gifts. The recession affected the amount of disposable income available for investment in higher education as well as the trust level between donors and institutions. Consequently, the combination of the two factors combined to adversely impact the non-tuition revenue sources available to colleges and universities.

Barr (2002) cited cost concerns, competition for faculty, cost for technology, and the rising cost of goods and services as driving factors in the increased cost of higher education. Most small colleges and universities are ill-equipped to withstand economic downturns in the same way that large institutions are able to, and thus, to survive these new economic realities, institutions eliminated programs, cut both staff and faculty positions, decreased administrative positions, and increased recruiting efforts all in an effort to reduce costs (O'Carroll, 2019). The data aligned with the conclusion of Harvard Business Professor Clayton Christensen (as cited in O'Carroll, 2019) who calculated that a large number of colleges and universities would be bankrupt in the next 10 to 15 years due to their financial condition.

In March 2020, a worldwide pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of human life (Dingman, n.d.). In the United States, a decision was made to lock down many industries (Goodman & Schulkin, 2020) for nearly two months. One of the many segments impacted by that lockdown was higher education, as colleges and universities sent students home to finish their education in virtual and online environments (National Conference of State Legislators [NCSL], 2020). The NCSL noted that institutions faced significant financial challenges related to refunds for unused student meal plans, student activity fees, and dorm rental fees, all of which

placed additional financial pressure on colleges and universities already struggling due to dependency on these non-tuition funding sources.

The Role and Importance of Fundraising in Higher Education

In an effort to bridge the widening gap between budget requirements and revenue, colleges and universities increasingly seek financial support from numerous outside sources, including foundations, parents, alumni, and philanthropically minded individuals (Barr, 2002). This philanthropic support has elevated the stature of American higher education to its current level and is considered vital to the ongoing financial sustainability of colleges and universities (Drezner, 2011).

American colleges and universities first began as private organizations funded through private sources (Worth, 2019). Harvard University serves as an example of the growth in fundraising support for private institutions (Harvard University, n.d.). From 1904-1905, Harvard embarked on a fundraising campaign to generate $2.5 million dollars for faculty salaries. In 1919-1920, the University once again sought fundraising support, raising $14 million dollars for their endowment. Finally, from 1956-1960, Harvard held a fundraising campaign to generate over $82 million dollars in support (Worth, 2019). As the needs of the institution grew, so did the opportunity to seek funding from donors willing to support the university. Dwarfing these efforts was one of Harvard's most recent fundraising campaigns that raised more than $9.1 billion dollars in support for the university, which now boasts an endowment of over $35 billion dollars (Worth, 2019). Fundraising has offered Harvard the ability to support over 1300 separate purposes, most of which underwrite student scholarships, and faculty teaching needs (Harvard University, n.d.).

In 2018, Baylor University, a larger private Christian institution, announced a $1.1 billion-dollar comprehensive campaign (Baylor University, n.d.). Their initiative was designed to support endowment, expendable funds meeting more immediate needs such as the president's excellence fund and academic priorities, as well as capital projects (Baylor University, n.d.). As of August 2020, the project had produced nearly $888 million dollars.

Two smaller, faith-based institutions, Biola University and Bethel University, have also recently documented campaign success. Biola University, a small, private Christian university in southern California, completed a comprehensive fundraising campaign in 2016, announcing over $214 million dollars raised in support of endowment, student affordability, a new science and technology center, and various other strategic initiatives (Biola University, 2017). Bethel University, another small, private Christian institution located in St. Paul, Minnesota, has an endowment of approximately $53 million dollars and is in the midst of its largest comprehensive fundraising campaign, attempting to raise $150 million dollars (Bethel University, n.d.). The differences between Biola University and Bethel University and their ability to generate donations is indicative of the fundraising challenge and opportunity available to colleges and universities in need of financial support.

What Defines Successful Fundraising

Institutions such as Harvard and Baylor have experienced substantial fundraising success and the corresponding ability to grow their endowments, thus creating financial stability for their institutions. The question remains: What makes those colleges and universities successful and are there comparable models of successful small, private Christian schools that can be studied in search of replicable fundraising strategies?

A review of the literature does not offer a universal definition for successful fundraising. In some studies, fundraising was measured by the total dollars raised or the number of new donors developed by an organization, while others used measures such as capital campaign results evidenced by new or improved buildings, athletic facilities, departments, or programs (Blansett, 2015; Hiles, 2010; Rosso, 2003; Sargeant & Shang, 2016). Regardless of the definition and measurement, Tempel (2003) determined fundraising to be a process of evaluating and analyzing the gift potential of a prospective donor and then creating an individualized fundraising plan focused on the donor's linkage to the organization, interest in the organization, and their ability to provide financial support. Research suggests that the use of donor research, enhanced engagement strategies, and data-driven metrics could result in more effective fundraising results (Helms et al., 2013; Te, 2017; Tempel et al., 2010).

Blansett (2015) suggested six critical questions to consider when fundraising:

- How many new donors have been added to the organization?

- What is the organization's donor retention rate?

- What is the long-term vision for fundraising and what metrics to measure success?

- What compelling or impactful organizational story can be shared with the prospective donor?

- Who are the right organizational leaders to engage in the fundraising process?

- What is the clearly defined amount of money the organization wishes to raise and for what purpose? (p. 40)

Blansett's (2015) research yielded similar results to Joyaux (2015) and Tempel (2003), determining that successful fundraising did not only emphasize securing financial gifts, but also connecting the donor to the organization by assisting with the larger fundraising process.

Birkholz (2008) and Hiles (2010) explored other common elements associated with successful fundraising and posited several factors commonly found in successful fundraising operations including:

- Identification, prioritization, and personal engagement with potential donors.

- Metric-driven decision-making to plan donor case development, solicitation, and follow-up.

- Driving toward at least 50% success on all proposals.

- Total number of donor visits (p. 52).

Curry et al. (2012) explored fundraising within the private, Christian college and university context and suggested successful fundraising should occur in a more transformational style. This transformational style was defined as an approach based on a Christian worldview and the teaching of Christ and how he helped transform the lives of his followers. This conceptualization led fundraisers in Christian circles to approach fundraising as being motivated by faith. According to Curry et al. (2012), fundraising success occurred when an emphasis was placed on relationship building and in-person meetings with donors, and mission-focused communication.

To better understand the fundraising process, an understanding of fundraising domains requires examination. Fundraising domains refer to the persons responsible and engaged in the fundraising process (Hager et al., 2002). According to Hager et al. (2002), three definitive fundraising domains exist in United States nonprofit organizations. The first was defined as inner

circle fundraising conducted by institutional staff specifically hired, trained, and tasked with raising funds for the institution. The second domain was defined as fundraising conducted by staff volunteers, board members, and others not formally employed by the fundraising institution, but individuals who were used to fundraising when their attendance or stature might assist in the fundraising process. The third domain was more abstract and represents institutional relationships with third-party fundraising organizations, such as the United Way or other tertiary groups.

At its core, fundraising is largely relationship based (Hiles, 2010). Wester (2019) categorized fundraising by focusing on four key tenets of successful fundraising: (a) acknowledgment, defined as the act of expressing gratitude to a donor; (b) stewardship, which is reporting to the donor the use and value of their gift; (c) recognition, which elevates stewardship by publicly recognizing the donor; and (d) engagement, which is demonstrated by providing donors with unique opportunities, such as special access to the organization, ongoing information not readily available to the general public, and experiences in the form of special events (Wester, 2019).

Fundraising Models

Different models of fundraising described the development process (Greenfield, 2002). First and most notable was the traditional model, which focused on metrics – the quantifiable measure used to assess or track the success of fundraising efforts. The donor pyramid, representing varying levels of donor engagement and interaction, was a second widely used model to display aspects of the fundraising process (Greenfield, 2002: Tempel, 2003). Third, a constituency model of fundraising, designed by Tempel (2003), focused on the connection between donors and an organization. Each model varied in design and structure but each

attempted to explain the complex process of donor interaction, therefore providing insight into the fundraising process and the organization for which funds were raised. These three models have been used to systematize the fundraising process (IUPUI -- The Fund Raising School, 2018). In 2020, the worldwide pandemic caused organizations to develop new models for fundraising focused on virtual technology (CCS Fundraising, 2020).

Traditional Model

According to Hiles (2010), the traditional model of fundraising focused on metrics and measurements, including total dollars raised, number of calls, donor contacts, and the number of donor proposals presented. Hiles (2010) posited that one of the most effective means of gauging fundraising success was to simply measure the number of successful donor solicitations compared to the total number of requests for support.

The donor pyramid has been traditionally used to depict the progression of donors within the philanthropy funnel and is usually anchored by prospective donors (Tempel, 2003). Each subsequent level in the pyramid compose new levels of donors beginning with first time donors, progressing to repeat and major donors, and ending with those who make legacy or planned gifts (IUPUI -- The Fund Raising School, 2018; Worth, 1993).

Constituency Model

Tempel (2003) defined the constituency model as a "visualized set of concentric circles" (p. 42) centered on the donors with the most energy and connection to an organization. The closer a donor or prospective donor was to an organization, the greater their bond with the organization; the further away from the center, the less connection a donor would have to the organization (Tempel, 2003). The constituency model posited that certain donors should populate the inner most circles, including major donors, board members, volunteers. As the

concentric circles expanded, the connection to an organization diminished and included those with tertiary connections to an organization, such as those donors with similar interests (Tempel, 2003).

Pandemic-Influenced Model

Fundraising experienced a paradigm shift due to the 2020 pandemic (Friga, 2020). The use of virtual donor engagement tools has increased as face-to-face meetings were cancelled to stop the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus (CCS Fundraising, 2020). A survey by Marts and Lundy (2020) of 46 fundraising organizations found that many development teams expected their work to look very different during and after the pandemic with hybrid staffing models and limited donor appeals. As the pandemic changed the face of fundraising, new donor engagement strategies continue to emerge, including increased use of electronic communication through email, social media, and virtual events, all of which are quite different from the traditional model (Barden, 2020; Hilser-Wiles, 2020; PNC Financial Services Group, 2020).

Types of Fundraising

One factor driving all types of fundraising is the development of institutional funding pipelines (Education Advisory Board, 2017). According to Durango-Cohen and Balasubramanian (2015), the ability to mine data focused on discovering prospective donors was essential in the fundraising process. This data analysis included the ability to segment and/or delineate donor behaviors through data points that might suggest a greater propensity to give to an institution. Magson and Routley (2009) further advanced that the development of donor pipelines relied on data analysis for identification of donors most likely to give to an organization.

Within fundraising, there are several universally recognized types of giving, including capital campaigns, planned and estate gifts, major gifts, annual fund gifts, and endowments (Tempel, 2003). Each type serves a specific purpose and use for institutional funding. Some are intended for the on-going operational needs of an institution. Others are meant to generate new gifts for specific capital expansion needs, increased endowment and scholarship support, or new and emerging programs.

Capital and Comprehensive Campaigns

According to the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE, n.d.), capital campaigns occur over a specific period of time and are designed to raise significant funds for a specific purpose such as building projects, scholarships, or other well-defined purposes (CASE, n.d.). Campaigns are a means for an organization to excite and motivate donors to partner in achieving a large organizational goal or priority (Drezner, 2011). Capital campaigns generally refer to fundraising for building, renovation, or expansion of facilities (Tempel, 2003). In comparison, comprehensive campaigns focus on the long term and diverse needs for an organization including endowment, program growth, and special purposes all based on comprehensive analysis (Tempel, 2003).

Planned Giving and Estate Gifts

PlannedGiving.com (n.d.) defined planned gifts as those that enable philanthropically minded donors to make larger gifts than they could normally make using ordinary income. Planned gifts can provide donors and their heirs with income while maximizing tax benefits (PlannedGiving.com, n.d.). Planned giving and estate gifts also provide the donor a conduit to maximize their gift to a specified charity or nonprofit organization. Planned gifts are often described as an individual's "ultimate gift" to an institution because in most instances, they are

given upon death (Drezner, 2011). Examples of these types of gifts are bequests, trusts, charitable gift annuities, charitable reminder trusts, and charitable lead trusts. According to Weisbrod and Asch (2010), planned gifts given to a school's endowment fund serve to improve the quality of the institutions' programs and to stabilize program expenditures.

Major Gifts

According to DonorSearch (n.d.), a major gift is generally the largest gift an organization will receive from a donor and may vary in size depending on the specific organization. Major gifts are usually the culmination of previous smaller gifts or as a result of many interactions with the prospective donor discussing institutional needs, donor connection to the organization or specific philanthropic purpose, and examples of the proposed gift's impact. Major gifts can often serve to substantially or fully fund a particular project (IUPUI -- The Fundraising School, 2019).

Annual Fund

The annual fund is considered the building block of a fundraising operation (Tempel, 2003). The mostly unrestricted gifts contributed to an annual fund are generally used for yearly operational support as established by the organization. The annual fund process also serves to widen the prospective donor pool by introducing a wider segment of the population to marketing and communication tools designed to educate potential donors. In the absence of an annual fundraising program, an organization may quickly find itself in a crisis fundraising situation, needing funds for new programs or unexpected organizational budget shortfalls (Drezner, 2011; Tempel, 2003).

Annual fund gifts are unique in that they are generally smaller and more numerous than major gifts (Tempel, 2003). They consist of funds given from a donor's regular income and in response to general solicitations from an organization. Annual fund gifts are usually accumulated

from a large number of donors. Organizations rely on a quantity of gifts in order to make an impact, compared to major gifts that can achieve an outcome independently (IUPUI -- The Fund Raising School, 2019). The primary objective of the annual fund is to solicit and secure new gifts, build and grow a base of donors, establish patterns of recurring giving, and to draw the larger institutional community together in a common cause (Tempel, 2003).

Endowments

An endowment fund is designed to provide financial stability to an organization, and in particular to higher education institutions (Tempel, 2003). Endowments provide a stream of income to the institution by investing donor funds and retaining the principle. Income generated from the invested funds is then made available for use by the organization (Worth, 1993). Endowment funds are invested in stock, bonds, or other investment tools to create an annual income derived from this investment, always for organizational use. (Tempel, 2003). According to Tempel (2003), creating endowments signals to potential donors that the organization is focused both on short-term needs and on the long-term health of an organization.

Fundraising Challenges

The challenges facing higher education have led to what many describe as unsustainable financial models (Lederman, 2018). Lederman pointed to data showing private college and university operating budgets contained much higher debt service needs as compared to that of public universities. The financial strains created by high debt service limited institutional ability to invest in other critical priorities. Additionally, for private institutions the use of endowment funds for general operating budgets was found to be nearly double that of public institutions; endowments have become critical for institutional stability. The dilemma created is a need for endowment fundraising when there are other competing institutional needs and priorities.

However, many small, private institutions possess a limited opportunity to raise large sums of capital for endowment purposes. Institutional data related to endowments showed that in 2018, 50 small, private, Christian universities averaged $66.6 million dollars in institutional endowments (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2018). In comparison, the average endowment for 50 of the most highly endowed schools – both public and private – averaged $15.25 billion dollars (Barham, 2019).

These financial realities made clear the need for private colleges and universities to find alternative funding sources, beyond endowments, with which to augment their declining operating budgets. The capability of small, private, Christian colleges and universities to create additional funding sources is even more critical to their future survival as fees for tuition, room, and board generally account for only two-thirds of their annual revenue (Chabotar, 2010). Fundraising is one possibility for this additional funding stream; however, successful and adequate fundraising to generate necessary revenue is a major challenge for these institutions.

In calendar year 2018, United States colleges and universities raised approximately $47 billion dollars (Joslyn, 2019). However, in the same report, Joslyn found that 28% of all monies raised for higher education was collected by just 20 colleges, the top five being Stanford University, Harvard University, University of Southern California, Cornell University, and the University of California at San Francisco. Small, private colleges and universities were not represented in this group of the highest resourced schools (Joslyn, 2019). Highlighting the challenge facing small, private colleges and universities, Valparaiso University prepared a Peer Benchmarking Report, which showed the average unrestricted annual fund revenue generated by the smaller schools was $1.9 million dollars, compared to large and prestigious institutions that average hundreds of millions of dollars in annual gift income.

A further challenge to fundraising is the changing philanthropic landscape, and more specifically, the way fundraisers interact with donors. Perry (2014) reviewed specific ways in which donor behaviors have changed over time. Most significantly, Perry discovered that donors no longer trusted nonprofit organizations to use gifts in an appropriate manner. Donors also began to desire specific and demonstrable projects for which they were being solicited. Fewer unrestricted gifts were believed to demonstrate a further erosion of trust (Perry, 2014).

A New Generation of Donors

A new generation of donors has also emerged, representing a new philosophy best described by engagement and involvement (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013). This new segment of donors is looking to achieve maximum value for their giving through both financial investment and personal action. According to Tempel (2003), they want to see long-term capitalization and desire to be involved in accomplishing the mission. In short, Tempel posited that they behave like venture capitalists and entrepreneurs rather than mere donors.

Millennials are the donor pool of the future and fundraisers must understand how they differ from previous generations of donors when considering how to approach and communicate with them; millennials will require a demonstration of organizational impact from the gifts they make (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013; Tempel, 2003). Young donors represent the new generation of philanthropists, as well as over $300 billion dollars in spending power (Saratovsky & Feldman, 2013). Saratovsky and Feldman also noted that millennials will inherit over $41 trillion dollars in transfer wealth from older generations. The challenge for institutions is to understand how millennial perspectives on philanthropy differ from previous generations. In contrast to their parents and grandparents, millennials are much more politically progressive; they are significantly less religious, have never lived in a world without technology, are self-

organized and socially connected, and they give to causes rather than to organizations generically (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013). Strategies previously employed to reach older generations may not resonate with the millennial generation of prospective donors.

Meer (2013) theorized that a correlation existed between donors who gave to institution while they were young and continued giving over their lifetime. Habit formation was found to influence behavior; focusing on younger donors and helping them form longitudinal philanthropic habits could increase the likelihood of developing long-term donors. Meer's (2013) data seemed to indicate a direct relationship between giving when one was young and giving as one aged.

Organizational Challenges

As economic conditions remain uncertain, many nonprofit organizations have limited the expansion of fundraising staff (Mart & Lundy, 2020; Masterson, 2009). Budget cutting measures at colleges and universities translate to more donor engagement by a smaller number of fundraising professionals, which can hinder fundraising success (Masterson, 2009). This contraction leads to reduced fundraising budgets, which creates the self-fulfilling effect of less money raised. Within this negative spiral, fundraisers may become pessimistic; those attitudes reduce fundraiser effectiveness and hinder donations as donors perceive doubt and uncertainty (Pitman, 2009; Meury, 2009).

Within this context, institutions are also challenged to recruit and retain fundraising professionals. Valbrun (2018) noted the increasing shortage of fundraising personnel, which impacts institutional ability to raise needed funds. Joslyn (2019) stated that the fundraising industry was a "pressure cooker" (p. 9) in which 84% of fundraisers expressed concern about the pressure they were under and over half stated they felt unappreciated. Levitz (as cited in

Lederman, 2017) conducted a survey in 2019 of 270 major and planned giving officers and found that, due to their workload, they did not believe they had the time required to interact with their large number of assigned donors and therefore became frustrated. Consequently, a 2019 Harris poll reported that 30% of current fundraisers planned to leave the industry (Joslyn, 2019).

Pressure and frustration have led to a significant exit of fundraisers from the development industry (Lederman, 2017), and these professionals were replaced by inexperienced newcomers who required time to learn the organization and their roles (Joslyn, 2019). Shaker and Nathan (2017) also found that development staff turnover was a significant challenge as fundraisers were routinely recruited away from their current employers by other organizations also in need of experienced fundraisers. The turnover impacted organizational connection with current donors due to the introduction of new fundraisers to the philanthropic process (Masterson, 2009). Masterson (2009) indicated that a transition period averaging five years was required for a fundraiser to achieve positive results.

A study by Curry et al. (2012) surveyed university presidents, development vice presidents, and provosts represented by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) to identify challenges and solutions to fundraising in difficult times. Their research indicated that due to increased workload brought about by decreased staffing and resources, organizations were required to focus on transactional fundraising practices instead of transformational approaches. According to Curry et al. (2012), as university resources diminished, the fundraising teams' ability to provide transformational attention to donors decreased, resulting in transactional, less personal, and less effective interactions with donors.

Controversies and Scandals

Over the past 20 years, controversies and scandals had a negative impact on the fundraising process (Valbrun, 2018). Panas (2010) suggested that a person soliciting a gift must have the respect of the donor. The existence of controversies and scandals impacts the ability of fundraisers to develop trust with potential donors thus possibly impeding the fundraising process. Salient examples such as the Penn State University sex scandal involving a football coach, or the tragic death of a football player at the University of Maryland, resulted in fundraisers having to delicately interact with passionate and engaged donors who had strong opinions about these situations and have the ability to impact fundraising and capital campaigns by withholding gifts (Valbrun, 2018).

Competition for Dollars and Donors

Fundraising faces yet another challenge due to an ever-growing number of causes and nonprofit organizations in need of funding, while the total number of possible donors continues to decline. Warner (2018) reported that the number of United States charities had grown from over 720,000 in 2001 to over 1,500,000 in 2015. This exponential growth indicated that the work of fundraising teams has become harder; donors were increasingly approached by expanding numbers of nonprofit organizations. Warner (2018) further stated, "Fundraising is like a big game of musical chairs. Donors are going to sit with the charity that engages them properly and makes them feel good" (p. 34).

The Pareto Principle, named after Vilfredo Pareto, stated that 80% of high value opportunities result from only 20% of the total available sources (Rosso, 2003; Warner, 2018). Research conducted by The Giving Institute (IUPUI Lily Family School of Philanthropy, 2019) found this concept to be true in fundraising. The annual Giving USA report consistently

documented that 80-90% of funds raised originated from 10-20% of a given donor pool (IUPUI

Lily Family School of Philanthropy, 2019). The report concluded that because of this ratio, the

pool of possible donors to any particular cause was limited and, therefore, the work of

fundraising teams competing against other worthy organizations challenges the fundraising

process, and was intensified by the fact that only 14% of all philanthropy went to institutions of

higher education (IUPUI Lily Family School of Philanthropy, 2019).

Decreased Individual Giving

Individual giving to nonprofit organizations, including colleges and universities,

continues to be the highest single source of philanthropy, at approximately 68% of all giving in

2018, and remains vitally important to the financial condition of those organizations (IUPUI Lily

Family School of Philanthropy, 2019). However, The Giving Institute (IUPUI Lily Family

School of Philanthropy, 2019) reported that individual giving dropped 1.1% (3.4% when

adjusted for inflation), making 2018 the first time since 1954 that individual giving fell below

70% of total philanthropy. Overall giving to education fell by 1.3% in the same time period

(3.7% when adjusted for inflation), after 10.9% increases in 2016-2017. This decline may signal

a larger trend, considering the ramification of tax law changes and changing philanthropic

demographics (IUPUI Lily Family School of Philanthropy, 2019).

Remote Fundraising

The worldwide pandemic of 2020 created challenges not experienced in recent memory

(Hisler-Wiles, 2020). Remote fundraising created new challenges for contacting and engaging

donors as face-to-face donor interactions were replaced with virtual meetings using various

technology platforms (Barden, 2020). Barden also posited that an organization's ability to

maintain relationships while using technology provided new opportunities for fundraising professionals to connect with donors while limiting possible exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

The impact of remote fundraising on the philanthropic world, and in particular on colleges and universities, remains unknown. A 2020 survey indicated that fundraising professionals expected decreased gift revenues, limited fundraising events, hiring freezes, staff reductions, and departmental budget cuts (Marts & Lundy, 2020). Even before the pandemic, institutions were being challenged to use technology more effectively to engage younger donors (Saratovsky & Feldmann, 2013). Time and experience will ultimately determine the impact of remote fundraising on college and university revenue streams.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research was conducted using an explorative comparative case study design to explore the characteristics of successful fundraising operations at three universities that are members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The CCCU is a higher education association comprised of more than 180 institutions around the world and more than 150 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada (CCCU, n.d.). CCCU colleges and universities share a Christian faith, and most of the schools are rooted in the arts and sciences (CCCU, n.d). The hope behind this study was to identify ideas and strategies that could be replicated by similar schools by answering this research question: What are the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, faith-based institutions that have proven successful, as measured by their current *U.S. News & World Report* and Forbes financial ratings?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was relationship management theory, which can be traced to Ken Burnett who, in 1992 developed a formal fundraising lexicon entitled relationship fundraising (MacQuillin & Sargeant, 2016). Burnett (2002) stated that a donor-based approach to fundraising was not new to the business of philanthropy but was becoming more fashionable in the marketing world. Simply stated, Burnett (2002) defined relationship management theory as having a primary focus on people and the intimacy of one-on-one engagement between donor and fundraiser. Burnett's model was donor-centric and based in relationship development, becoming the fundraising ideology for the philanthropic community.

Waters (2008) advanced Burnett's (2002) model, with initial research conducted in public relations. Waters (2008) hypothesized that relationship management could be expanded to fundraising and nonprofit work. Fundraising research began to show that relationship cultivation

was more important to the fundraising process than was the practice of investing in donor marketing (Waters, 2008). Waters (2008) cited Rosso's (1993) research into donor longevity, which highlighted the need for dedicating time to donor relationships as imperative to successful fundraising.

Waters' (2008) relationship management theory stressed the importance of cultivating relationships with donors to increase donor loyalty to an organization. The foundation of this theory suggested that by dedicating more time cultivating donor relationships, an increased level of donor loyalty could be created, leading to increased giving. Hall, as cited in Waters (2008), also believed that organizations desiring long-term philanthropic support from donors needed to invest time in the practice of relationship development, thus increasing the focus on relationship management. Waters (2008) further posited that approaching a donor for a second gift was much easier than seeking the first gift from a new donor.

Kelly (2000) advanced Waters' (2008) theory by adding that stewardship was second in importance to donor relations. Kelly's (2000) normative theory of fundraising was based on research originally conducted for public relations but was determined to be germane to fundraising. Kelly (2000) theorized that fundraising strategies must incorporate four key elements of stewardship that led to deeper relationship with donors: (a) reciprocity, which ensured donors were thanked for their gifts by intentional acts of acknowledgment; (b) responsibility, which assured donors that the organization would use gifts in a socially responsible manner – the concept of "keeping promises" (p. 114); (c) reporting, which demonstrated basic accountability to the donors and the organization; and (d) relationship nurturing, which focused on practices that cultivated donor input and feedback.

Drezner (2011) further described relationship management theory as the act of establishing, developing, and maintaining successful long-term relationship exchanges. According to Drezner, organizations that expect to have long-term relationships with donors, need significant investment in relationship building. Relationship management theory provided a framework for fundraising as an interpersonal activity; however, the effectiveness of unique programs, strategies, or technologies used in the fundraising process were not examined.

Within the conceptual framework of relationship management theory, the researcher explored successful fundraising operations at three universities and, in particular, the characteristics that appeared to contribute to their success. Relationship management theory was thought to undergird institutional success, thus exploration of the processes, programs, training, and/or operational strategies of the advancement operations of the participating institutions was examined.

Research Design

Bogdan and Biklen (2016) described qualitative research as being naturalistic, occurring in actual settings that were used as data sources. They also framed qualitative research as descriptive; the data was explained in words and pictures, as opposed to quantitative research, which relies on numbers. The process of meaning making was another significant aspect of qualitative research, which focused on gathering data without hypothesis and then used an inductive process to assign meaning to the finding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016).

A case study research design was used to conduct this exploration. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2016), the general design of this type of study can be illustrated as a funnel, with the beginning of the study represented by the wide end of the funnel. As the study progresses through data collection and analysis, the study narrows, focusing on common characteristics or

traits discovered throughout the research process. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) posited that the design of a case study is often faced with the dilemma of whether to examine a typical situation where the research subjects are all similar, or to look for exceptional subjects based on research discovered prior to the study that showed the uniqueness of the research subjects. This study examined three atypical subjects based upon their exceptional success in fundraising. Stake (1978) discussed the challenges to case studies, citing the difference between the researcher's observations and measurements; he suggested that the way in which observations were made and measured can affect the perspective of the research.

The research was conducted as a multi-case study examining the characteristics of successful fundraising operations at three private CCCU universities, and subsequently comparing and contrasting data from all three cases, searching for common traits or characteristics using MAXQDA to code important and consistent themes found in each case study. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) suggested that researchers conducting comparative case studies do fieldwork at only one site at a time and not at multiple sites simultaneously. Doing so ensures that data is not comingled and thereby eliminates research confusion.

Bogdan and Biklen (2016) outlined several steps in the comparative case study research process, including: (a) data collection that identifies key issues, events, activities, or other information that could become categories of research focus; (b) data collection that discovers the diversity of dimensions under the defined categories; (c) data analysis and written descriptions of collected information; and (d) review, coding, and analysis of the overall findings within each category. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) surmised that the ability to critique data in an analytical fashion helped to make the research findings theoretically relevant.

Using the comparative case study model for this research provided the best opportunity to examine the various universities and their potentially differing operating styles, methodologies, technologies, personnel training protocols, constituent groups, and geographic locations.

Prior to the study, informed consent was collected from interview participants prior to the interviews. A 14-question interview protocol was used to determine what processes, programs, training protocols, or strategies the universities employed that impacted the organizations' successful fundraising outcomes. Video interviews were scheduled with institutional senior leaders, advancement department members, board members, and other relevant individuals and leaders. Questions were sent to the participants prior to interviews, allowing for preparation and time to assemble supporting documentation.

Site and Participant Selection

According to ongoing studies exploring institutional health, small, private institutions face increased financial challenges requiring fundraising as a significant means of operational support (Chatobar, 2010; Jones et al., 2018; 2010; Selingo, 2013; Seltzer, 2017; Valbrun, 2018; Weisbrod & Asch, 2010). The future of this sector of higher education must rely on donative funding to provide up to 33% of university budgets (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016).

For the purpose of this study, research was conducted at three small, private, Christian colleges that met these criteria: (a) undergraduate student populations totaling between 2,000 and 4,000; (b) membership in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU); (c) endowments of at least $100 million dollars; and (d) a Forbes financial rating of at least a "B," standing in the top half of all similar schools within *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. Combining the *U.S. News & World Report* findings with the Forbes financial review of school financial health provided a comprehensive view of higher education. Cross-referencing CCCU

schools, *U.S News & World Report* rankings, and Forbes financial scores provided three universities that fit the criteria for this study (Appendix A).

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the three sites, pseudonyms were used in this study: Western University, Midwest University, and South East University. Western University, a member of the CCCU, has an undergraduate student population of 4,000 students, received a high *U.S. News & World Report* rating for national universities, placed in the top quartile for its category, and earned a "B" financial rating from Forbes. Midwest University, another CCCU school, has an undergraduate student population of 2400 students, placed in the top one-third in the national liberal arts college category, and held an "A" financial rating from Forbes. South East University, a member of the CCCU has an undergraduate student population of 2800 students, received a moderately high *U.S. News & World Report* rating, and earned a "B" financial rating from Forbes; it also has a large land asset contributing to significant financial stability. All three institutions share similar programs, pricing, and evangelical Christian missions.

Although little public information concerning philanthropy for these universities exists, public records monitor total endowment. In 2017, Midwest University reported an endowment over $450 million dollars; Western University's endowment exceeded $100 million dollars; and South East University's endowment was nearing $100 million, but that institution's large land asset significantly increased its value. Therefore, participants were selected based on purposive sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). All three organizations are led by senior leaders with the title of vice president for advancement or development. In addition, second tier leaders from all three institutions were interviewed; this tier of leaders fills roles defined as vice presidents,

senior directors, and directors; they all provide oversight to development, fundraising, and advancement activities.

Data Collection

Data was collected primarily through virtual interviews using Zoom video conferencing. Interviews were scheduled for 30-45 minutes in length with an additional 15 minutes for follow-up questions and virtual data review (60 minutes overall). All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed using a computerized transcription service. Transcription notes were imported into MaxQDA and a search and analysis of key words and themes was conducted.

Institutional documentation was requested for corroboration. Data, in the form of reports, training materials, fundraising policies, organizational structures, procedures, and other similar materials, were requested and, in some cases, collected and examined for characteristics that potentially impacted effectiveness at each institution. The request for written materials sought to provide understanding of the following:

- team design and staffing;

- fundraising roles and responsibilities;

- staff goals, assessment and review;

- fundraising programs and practices;

- metrics for gauging success by individual fundraising personnel, the team at large, and the organization as a whole;

- donor cultivation and management;

- donor recognition;

- other best practices or non-traditional practices deemed successful.

Additional examination was conducted to determine unique and non-traditional practices that appeared to contribute to successful outcomes. Once interviews and notes were transcribed, member checking was completed with research participants receiving interview transcripts for review, editing, additions, and expansions.

Interview Protocol

Interview questions were designed through the examination of materials created by the IUPUI Lily Family School of Philanthropy. The interview protocol was further tested and refined with the assistance of an experienced development staff member at a separate CCCU institution. A predesigned set of interview questions (Appendix B), allowing for deviance depending on the answers, was followed as permitted by semi-structured interview protocols (Merriam, 2009).

Each of the interview questions was based on relationship management theory and was designed to explore fundraising characteristics and success factors, including but not limited to personal characteristics, the use of data, technology, development staff experience, training protocols, and unique programs and processes. Further examination of strategies and programs, were explored to find themes present in the three organizations' success. Interviews focused on the relationship between donors and fundraisers as well as the role of metrics in the fundraising process. Exploration of the role of the fundraising team leader examined their impact on successful fundraising operations.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) stated that the purpose of data analysis was to seek answers to research questions. Creswell (2018) identified five distinct steps necessary for data analysis, including organizing and preparing for analysis, examining data, coding data, describing themes, and representing or describing research themes. In particular, this study looked for themes, such as

relationship building, data analytics, the effect of stewardship, best practices in training, as well as team structure. Content analysis was used to examine the process; the number of times a certain phrase or word was used in interview transcripts was tabulated in the results. Thematic analysis was also conducted to search transcripts and written data for commonalities between the three sample institutions (Hancock et al., 2009).

Upon completion of each Zoom interview, all interviews were transcribed by a hired, external automated transcription service and loaded into MAXQDA to search for key themes and topics. Institutional documents and data were analyzed with additional material was added to MAXQDA. Generally, information related to best practices, donor engagement, team goals and objectives, as well as programs and processes unique to fundraising at the participating organizations, was explored through MAXQDA.

Coding

Cropley (2019) defined coding as the process of identifying statements made during interviews or in written materials relevant to the study. To ensure data was accurately coded and to provide inter-rater reliability, a second coder was used for collected data. The process provided for examination of data fragments and attempted to distinguish between substantive data, which is data with specific reference, and theoretical data that refers to concepts (Cropley, 2019). An open coding process was used to search for broad similarities contained in the transcribed interview notes. These codes were then analyzed and the data was divided into more specific categories and subcategories. Steps involved in the coding process included summarizing the information and clarifying statements, and eliminating non-relevant material. In addition, key words were coded, including stewardship, vision and mission, trust, communication, events, relationship(s), strategy, and fundraising qualities. The next step in the

coding process was analytic coding composed of in-depth reading and reflection upon transcribed interview notes.

Limitations of Methodology

A number of inherent limitations exist in qualitative research. Thus, some limitations of this dissertation study are the result of the research design. The study is limited in three specific ways which could impact or influence the interpretation of the data. The first limitation is that only three institutions participated in the study, all being small, private, Christian institutions. This fact limits the data to institutions from only three regions of the country and from similar denominational traditions. A second limitation was the interpretation of collected data. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The decisions about key words, phrases, or key findings were subjective, based on the researchers' interpretation of the interviews and material review. This subjectivity is inherent in case study methodology (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the advancement departments studied may not be uniquely successful, but their institutions' fundraising efforts may benefit from institutional history, reputation, denominational connections, or other confounding factors that may account for their fundraising success.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are based on the Belmont report issued in 1978 (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The report outlined ethical practices required for research involving human subjects and included three key principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The report called for informed consent and the ability of research subjects to withdraw consent at any time.

Research ethics also consider the relationship between researcher and the individuals being studied (Mack et al., 2005). In 1964, the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)

adopted, and in 1999 updated, a code of ethics, principles, and standards for fundraising professionals. These aspirational standards were designed to serve as an orientation for fundraising and to ensure all fundraising professionals worked under a common set of values (Tempel, 2003). Valbrun (2018) noted that the interactions between donors and those tasked with managing their gifts required relationships founded on demonstrated tact and privacy. Due to the private nature of donor relations, maintaining the confidentiality of all participants' institutional donors was a priority. Questions were not asked that would reveal specific giving patterns, gift amounts, or the identity of donors unless that information was accessible in the public domain.

During the member-checking process, the three vice presidents from participating institutions could request certain material be removed the study. Information shared in interviews and later considered to be private or proprietary was subject to removal from the written study and, in a few cases, information was deleted at the request of the respondents. The final version of this dissertation will also be shared with participating organizations prior to publication.

Credibility/Consistency/Dependability

The ability to replicate findings from a study is important to the research process, however, the subjective nature of qualitative research presents unique challenges. Qualitative research involves the analysis of collected data and summarizing all results in a manner that is consistent with the collected information. Theoretically, the process should also lead to the discovery of consistent themes (Hancock et al., 2009).

Creswell (2018) encouraged the use of specific procedures that promote validity. In conducting this dissertation research, two validity protocols were used: triangulation and member checking. Triangulation occurred as numerous data sources, including interviews and official documents, were explored and correlated to build a justification for the themes discovered in the

study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Additionally, with member checking, all respondents were provided copies of their transcripts and the report for review, revisions, and additions, validating the accuracy of the data (Birt et al., 2016).

Summary

This dissertation study explored the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, Christian universities with proven success, as measured by the size of their endowment, their successes in annual fundraising, and overall industry reputation. Through an exploratory comparative case study, semi-structured interviews and the examination of development department documents were used to uncover processes, strategies, programs, technology tools, and/or training regimens that seemed to positively impact the fundraising success of the participating institutions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

An exploratory comparative case study research design was used to examine the

characteristics of fundraising operations at three small, private Christian universities that have

proven to be financially successful, as measured by the size of their endowment, the success of

their most recent fundraising campaigns, and their annual fundraising performance. Data was

collected through Zoom interviews with participants at each of the three institutions. Interviews

were recorded through Zoom and transcribed by a third-party transcription service.

Transcriptions were shared with participants for the purpose of member checking. MAXQDA

was used for organizing and analyzing the data into codes and themes.

Case Study 1: Western University

Western University (a pseudonym) is an Evangelical Christian university in the western

region of the United States with an undergraduate student population of approximately 4,000

students. The institution is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

(CCCU) and received a "B" Forbes financial rating with a $150 million-dollar estimated

endowment. At the time of this research, the university's most recent capital campaign had ended

and exceeded established goals.

Discussion of the Sample

Participants were selected based on their relationship to the institution and included the

university president, the vice president for development, four senior university development

staff, and externally connected university volunteers. Interviews were conducted in February and

March 2021 and each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. Due to the need to protect the identities of

each subject, pseudonyms were used. The researcher maintained detailed interview notes including interview date, time, and the pseudonym assigned to each subject.

Case Study Themes

Interview data was entered into MAXQDA for the purpose of sorting and analyzing the participant responses to a 14-question protocol (see Appendix B). The data was coded into themes discovered throughout the six interviews, resulting in 16 general themes, with seven or more quotations associated with each theme code.

Seven primary themes emerged, with participants expressing overall consensus in the importance of those themes to Western University's fundraising success. A summary of the themes is provided in Table 1. Each theme will be described later in this chapter.

Table 1

Themes: Successful Fundraising at Western University

Primary Themes Present
Vision and Mission
Use of the President
Stewardship Practices
Personal Character Traits
Operational Character Traits
Relationships
The Influence and Impact of Faith

Theme 1: Vision and Mission

The theme of vision and mission appeared in half of the participant interviews, and although only half of participants mentioned this theme, the external community members unanimously cited it as important to the success of Western University's fundraising practice. Three of the respondents shared common examples of the connection between vision and mission. For example, Brad, the president of Western University, stated, "I think it's a vision for

the institution that makes fundraising successful." Brad often referred to the way in which the university attempted to directly connect the schools' vision to the work of fundraising, and how they created opportunities for donors to see how their philanthropy could impact students and further the institutional mission. Peter, a university board member, also described the connection between vision and mission when he said, "People give when they see a vision and when they see a vision that helps you towards your mission." This theme, "casting a vision" specifically connected to the institutional mission, was consistent and pervasive.

Additionally, participants described a "fidelity to mission" as being critical to the work of fundraising. This theme was referred to in both specific wording and analogies as a "distinctive" of the university. Participants provided examples of how the university focused on ensuring their institution remained faithful to its Christian heritage and exemplary educational standards while also maintaining "fidelity to mission"; for example, by continuing to require rigorous Bible courses in every student's program.

Theme 2: Use of the President

The majority of participants interviewed cited the use of an institutional president as essential to the fundraising process. Furthermore, respondents referred to the interactions between the president and the development team as vital or important to successful fundraising. Use of the president emerged in several sub-themes, including the president serving as the institution's chief advancement officer, the president working with a portfolio of donors and donor prospects, the president serving as the primary ambassador for the institution. Constituent trust in leadership was also identified as a sub-theme.

Chief Institutional Advancement Officer. Brad, the university's president, made perhaps the most telling statement concerning the president's role in fundraising:

The president of any organization is truly the chief advancement officer of that

organization. There are vice presidents over development, advancement, whatever it is

you use, but I know that it is very important for the president to see herself or himself as

that, and if you didn't come out of that kind of experience, you've got to get up to speed.

Similarly, Kristin, a senior university development staff member, stated, "I think for Western

University, the president has a very strong connection in our donor community and is a very

compelling figure in our fundraising." Similar to other interview respondents, this perception of

the president's connection to the donor community showed the high value of the president being

involved in the philanthropic work of the institution.

This sub-theme, relative to the president's role as the chief institutional advancement

officer, emerged in the interviews with the board member participants as well. For example,

Warren, a university board member, described the need for the president to truly be the face of

the university. He referred to the president as the "shepherd of the institution," recognizing the

president's role in leading fundraising efforts and seeing this responsibility as a key job

requirement. A number of participants referenced the enthusiasm and motivation for serving in

this capacity by the president; this was best summarized by Warren, when he said, "You don't

have to drag [the president] to meetings kicking and screaming to meet with potential or existing

donors. That's something he gladly does, and I'm sure the team appreciates it."

Finally, participants also cited the need for the president, vice president for development,

and the development team to maintain a strong and collaborative partnership. The work of the

president seemed to be understood as a partnership with the development team, as well as a job

that demonstrated the desire and ability to regularly conduct philanthropic work.

Working with a Portfolio. The concept of the president carrying or working with a portfolio of donors was another sub-theme within the primary theme of use of the president. In fundraising terms, this was described by participants as the process of having a specific group of donors or donor prospects assigned to the president. According to respondents, the president was responsible for engaging with this particular group of donors, working to either steward the existing relationship or grow a new relationship. This portfolio work was described by Holly, a development leader:

> We've recently shifted our model from the president having a larger portfolio to now having a much smaller portfolio. I want to say he has less than 20 people who are in his portfolio, but at the same time, we really want to capitalize on his time and donor relations. What we're doing is putting more of those high profile, high net worth prospects in our major gift portfolios and creating strategies for the president to engage with those people, but not necessarily to be the relationship manager – so to kind of strategically come in and be a part of advancing and moving those relationships forward at critical times.

Other participants, including the president himself, reiterated this presidential function. According to Brad, as the president, he has been very intentional about not only talking about general strategies with the advancement team, but also being more engaged in seeking donor support for specific projects while working with his assigned donors.

Primary Ambassador for the Institution. Further defining the primary theme of use of the president, participants described the president as the primary ambassador for the institution. For example, Warren, a member of the university's governing board, said, "You need your president to be the face of the institution." The president provided several specific examples of

how he conceptualizes his role as an ambassador for the institution, including his work with students, his interactions with internal and external constituents, and his responsibility to represent the institution on behalf of its students, staff, and faculty. He described the work of an ambassador as follows:

> At events, I spend as much time (I will barely eat a bite and my wife is usually with me) going from table to table just talking to people. And we don't have to worry about talking too long, because someone's going to prompt me. I also have plenty of time in my schedule that I set aside (if not during COVID-19) to have lunches, breakfast, dinners with donors. We have events at our house, and we have events at school. Some are small, some are big, and some are one-on-ones.

Interviews with other participants confirmed the time and attention necessitated by the president's role as ambassador; interviews also reinforced the importance of this unique conceptualization of the presidential role and work.

Constituency Trust in Leadership. The final sub-theme under the use of the president can be described as constituency trust in leadership. This sub-theme was less defined and explicit, and instead demonstrated how participants felt the institution's constituency should feel about the president. When referring to trust in leadership, Alan, the vice president for development, stated:

> The data that I've been paying attention to says that the number one reason why people give to an organization is because they believe in the mission of the organization, and they trust the leadership. And so, when I say "trust the leadership," it's obviously the president, but it trickles down.

In a more general sense, every participant mentioned aspects of trust related to how the president was used in various situations. Trust in the president was necessary for donors to believe in the mission of the organization and thus a key component in the fundraising process. The president was also a key connection point to donors by bringing gravitas to potential requests for financial support. The president of Western University was described as the organization's primary ambassador, meeting and interacting with large swaths of donors and constituents, and representing the organization by painting a vision of the future to which the organization was driving. Each participant made reference to constituency trust in leadership as foundational to successful fundraising. In particular, all participants seemed to believe that the role of the president was vital in both cultivating trust and being effective in philanthropic work.

Theme 3: Stewardship Practices

Of all the primary themes, stewardship practices was the largest of all coded categories, containing 29 individual citations through MAXQDA. All six participants referred to stewardship as significant to the success of Western University's fundraising operations. Although the participants' definitions of stewardship varied, their descriptions included similar mentions of the act of thanking and/or recognizing donors for their investments in the organization. According to the interviews, stewardship was exemplified through activities such as sending thank you notes and invitations to special events and gatherings, ensuring presidential contact, delivering focused communications from the university, providing donor recognition in written materials, and naming scholarships in honor of donors.

The different respondents all focused on varying aspects of stewardship. Some participants described how stewardship practices were executed, others emphasized that meaningful stewardship necessitated expressed thanks to donors – including a demonstrated

connection between the gift and an outcome. As evidence that these stewardship practices occurred, participants shared examples of communications to donors, including impact reports that documented – with pictures – the use of gifts and how the donor's generosity impacted students. One participant specifically described the process for maintaining stewardship practices:

> We have somebody who's responsible for donor's stewardship. They come alongside everyone who has a portfolio, and we actually build a name-by-name strategy for how we are going to both maintain and deepen the relationship. That goes from probably the $10,000 donor all the way up to the multimillion-dollar donor. And so, it's a name-by-name strategy, and we go literally through every single name and talk about what are the various touch points through the year? What should those touch points look like? Where do we plug the president in? Where do I plug in? Where does the fundraiser plug in? Is there a Christmas gift or no Christmas gift? A new book from a faculty member? Do we think this would actually align with some of their interests? I've got somebody whose antenna is up, and they know the donor base well enough, and they're working close enough with each of us that we have built that strategy to the point where the president will shoot a text when he knows that it's their grandson's birthday. Then, living into the relationship because you care about these people and remember those significant moments and send them certain books and invite them to certain events. And so, it's very, very deliberate on our part.

Similarly, another participant summarized the process as a series of touchpoints that the donor experiences after a gift is made, including written expressions of thanks and increased contacts between the university and the donor.

A number of participants described acts of donor stewardship as "creative gratitude." Western University appeared to intentionally seek opportunities to demonstrate to donors the impact of their gifts, often through connecting them with the students directly affected by their gifts. For example, according to Alan, vice president for development, Western University had used the idea of a video greeting for stewarding a mega gift. The video was a montage of students in lab coats and doing research in labs thanking the donors for their gift. The video also included a fly-through of the space showing the donors the result of their gift. He stated, "It's just thinking of creative ways to bring the acknowledgement of the gift to life." Other examples provided by participants included taking students to see donors at their places of employment, thus providing opportunities for the donors to share about their scholarships with their friends and associates. The theme of stewardship was also demonstrated through the practice of presidential travel programs. According to participants, Western University believes that providing donors intentional time with the president during special travel experiences is a substantial opportunity to steward and thank donors for their partnership with the institution. Alan described this practice as "travel with a purpose."

In discussing stewardship, every participant reinforced the concept of thanking donors for their generosity. Some interviewees indicated ideas concerning the number of times a donor should be thanked for a gift or the method by which they should be thanked. Even though the examples differed, expressing gratitude and thanks to donors was seen as a high priority.

Theme 4: Personal Character Traits

The fourth primary theme emerged containing codes that could be described as personal character traits. Although this term was not specifically used, it can be inferred to explain traits that participants believed were essential to successful fundraisers. Specifically, participants

described the two sub-themes of trustworthiness and person of character. The description of

trustworthiness was different from how they described trust in leadership; trustworthiness was

described as a trait participants expected to see manifested in the lives and work of the

development team. All six Western University interview participants mentioned the concepts of

trust, trustworthiness, and character when they described key traits that made their university's

fundraising efforts successful. In total, these traits were found in at least 15 specifically coded

segments, and they were also seen 26 times, in various ways, in the trusted relationships code.

Trustworthiness. According to participants, fundraisers must be trustworthy to be

professionally successful. Furthermore, respondents indicated that trustworthiness was based on

a person's character and was fundamental in the makeup of a good fundraising professional. As

Brad, the Western University president, described this trait, he said, "If you're trustworthy,

[donors] just kind of can sense it." When the participants described trust and trustworthiness, the

tone of the interview became serious and direct. These traits were clearly recognized as being

paramount to the work of fundraising.

Participants emphasized that trustworthiness allowed fundraisers to develop deep and

meaningful relationships with donors. For most participants, trustworthiness also included the

element of longitudinal relationships. According to Brad, trustworthiness was the result of a

"track record." He indicated that longevity allowed for trusted, enduring relationships, which

were key to building good philanthropic processes. Another participant, Warren, similarly

emphasized the long-term relationship component:

It's not just about the money. It's about being in these trusted relationships and kind of

doing life with donors over the long haul and being in their lives when something

significant happens in their lives where there's a liquidation event, or they are at a season

of life where it's time to start giving away some of what God's entrusted to them.

Perhaps this longitudinal time component also included an element of authenticity, as Brad stated

his concern with fundraisers that he labeled as "carpet baggers" who move from organization to

organization with limited commitment to the institution's mission. Brad suggested that these

types of development professionals may have the necessary fundraising skillsets but lacked the

connectivity to organizational mission and the ability to develop deep donor relationships.

In contrast, Warren spoke of the impact of breaking donor trust: "Breaking that trust –

boy, that would have, in my opinion, catastrophic consequences." According to participants, a

lack of trust would negatively impact not just giving, but also mission fulfillment, because of the

significant relationship between the two.

Ultimately, trustworthiness seemed to be the result of long-term relationships in which

the donor and the university employees "did life together." As summarized by Peter, a university

board member, "I think a lot has to do with their character and who they are as people. It still is

the little things that they do that engender a sense of trust, a sense of professionalism."

Person of Character. A person of character was described by the interview participants

as being ethical and truthful, as well as having integrity. This sub-theme was specifically coded

eight times in MAXQDA. Although not as high as other codes, it was obvious in the interviews

that the concept of personal character was seen as a baseline – or minimum – expectation for all

of Western University's fundraising professionals. When the participants described this trait,

their verbal and non-verbal signals were evident on the videoconferencing call; based on body

language and tone of voice, personal character was a very important trait for their organization.

One participant, Adam, demonstrated the importance of character when he said:

I would hire a person of high character and limited experience before I would hire

someone of incredible experience and limited character. I weigh pretty heavily on the character side as being a driver. I believe that you can learn fundraising, you can learn how to do this. You can grow into it if you're wired a certain way [though], not everybody. I can't really teach character. I can teach fundraising.

A number of participants did not explicitly use the word character, but instead referred to a similar idea relative to fundraising. For example, Peter described successful professional fundraisers: "You want someone with conviction, but you want someone who could share that conviction with kindness and gentleness, and humility and do it in a winsome way." These traits, among others, combined to form a broader understanding and definition of a person of character.

Theme 5: Operational Characteristics

The theme operational characteristics emerged from descriptions of actions, processes, or systems in the advancement division at Western University. More specifically, operational characteristics were evidenced in the way Western University measured fundraising effectiveness, through the use of metrics, set goals, and established accountabilities for their team as an entity, as well as for each individual team member. Operational characteristics also included their use of communication tools and strategies to engage donors and donor prospects. Coding proved to be somewhat complex for this characteristic; it was composed of numerous themes that differed while still being operationally focused, such as creating a case for support, articulating a sense of urgency, using technology, developing useful marketing materials, analyzing metrics, and employing strong communication tools and practices.

Metrics. The sub-theme of metrics emerged as an important component of the primary theme of operational characteristics. The interviews with the president, vice president of development, and senior development leader, they were unified in their evaluation of metrics.

They acknowledged that their ability to track and measure results through the use of metrics was vitally important to fundraising success. They described the process of measuring team progress through annual goals, which they created at the beginning of each year and reviewed regularly, to track progress towards the long-term goal.

Interview participants explained that frontline fundraiser metrics were measured weekly by reviewing the number of phone calls made by development officers, the number of donor meetings, and the number of donor "asks." Brad summarized Western University's use of metrics: "You set your benchmarks, and then you see how you did." Holly explained the use of metrics at Western University as not only measuring the dollars raised but being equally concerned with what she described as "portfolio penetration:"

> We are actually in the process of reworking our metrics, but historically we would look at taking somebody from qualification into cultivation. What are the moves management that you've done throughout the year? We are prepping to go to more of a scorecard metrics and then having corresponding KPI's (key performance indicators) for each of those metrics.

Thus, Western University's use of metrics measured a broad "portfolio penetration" that the different tasks necessitated to move donor relationships forward.

Goal Setting and Accountabilities. According to participants, another critical sub-theme of operational characteristics was goal setting and accountabilities, or the value associated with creating metrics through which areas over which each team member would be held responsible. Interestingly, this sub-theme was prevalent throughout the employee ranks, with even the president of Western University having an established list of accountabilities that the Board of Trustees used to measure his performance (which included a significant focus of time and energy

on fundraising). The president seemed to use accountabilities as part of the university's culture related to measuring success.

All Western University's internal team member participants mentioned goals and accountabilities. Alan described accountabilities at the individual level, explaining that "the goal is linked to the priorities of the institution. And we call them accountabilities. I have my own set of accountabilities, the short list of things that I'm responsible for at a higher level."

However, these accountabilities extended beyond the individual to the department as well. Holly provided the systemic description of the goal-setting process:

> We will actually start with our frontline fundraisers and going through, at the beginning of each year, their portfolios to see where there's opportunity. And we collectively look at all of those opportunities with all of our portfolios to determine what we have in the pipeline to help us create educated goals. We don't want to basically say we're going to raise $10 million for this capital campaign project when we only have $2 million in the pipeline. We want to make sure that we're making really educated goals and making sure that we have the prospects, making sure that we have the team who's able to do that.

According to the participants, leaders worked with each subset of the development units to set goals and accountabilities. Holly explained:

> We divide up the work as part of our strategy. We're looking at what can the foundation bring to the table? What can planned giving bring to the table? What can the major gift team bring to the table? What is the work that we want our president to do to really help us advance our goals?

Communication Tools and Practices. Communication tools and practices was the final sub-theme of operational characteristics. Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized the

need for effective communication with donors, donor prospects, and the greater institutional community to grow their prospective donor pools or to share results with current donors. Participants described this communication as "winsome" in style yet containing intentional and strategic stories that shared a message of vision, need, or impact.

In one interview, Holly shared that Western University strives to use extremely customized communication with donors and donor prospects within each of their portfolios. She said that all development officers have full authority to determine which communication pieces are received by their tracked donors to customize their experience with the university. One communication example referenced repeatedly by participants was the institutional magazine. Western University uses their magazine as their large-branded communication tool, to share their institutional messages and attempt to reach broader audiences of donors and donor prospects.

Although all participants spoke highly of the institutional magazine as an important communication tool, they also cited the need to ensure an organization used the right marketing and communication pieces in the right ways and with the right audiences to build organizational brand. For example, Alan described more personalized communication opportunities that have proven successful, in particular, the gathering together of key donors and donor prospects to interact with the university president in a smaller setting. He posited that this allowed for more rich and engaging dialogue about the organization's vision for the future and its needs.

According to participant interviews, the communication tools or messages were not necessarily different between those used for connecting with donors versus those used for connecting with prospective donors. Kristin said:

The way we communicate differently between prospective donors and current donors really finds its way primarily in our appeals strategy – our mass marketing strategy. As an

institution, I don't think we bring very many messages to prospective donors. Donors as

key stakeholders are certainly always at the table as a key audience, but I'm not sure if

perspective donors have been, which is an interesting question.

In each of these cases the concept of prospective donor communication was not mentioned as a

key strategy employed at Western University. Instead, their communication practice was

intentional and focused on those with whom they already had a philanthropic relationship.

Theme 6: Relationships

The primary theme of relationships consists of two sub-themes, new relationships and

existing relationships. Interview participants all spoke about the involvement of development

officers in the lives of donors. Respondents provided examples of staff members performing

weddings and funerals for donors and their families. Warren felt that relationships were the

building blocks of successful and enduring fundraising. He referenced his own experience with

fundraisers that had approached him for a gift and noted that the ones that had success securing a

gift had taken time to develop meaning relationships with him and his wife. The participants

described relationships that appeared to be genuinely authentic and meaningful.

Not surprisingly, relationship development and management was identified 24 times in

the MAXQDA coding process. However, throughout the interviews, a distinction emerged

between new relationships and those that already existed between the organization and the donor.

New Relationships. For new relationships, the emphasis seemed to be on convenience

and comfort for the new donors. One participant, Alan, provided examples of how Western

University tried to create comfortable situations to leverage and engage new donors by providing

multiple points of entry to the organization. He said that the ability to connect with donors in

smaller meetings with the president, or at intimate events held at the homes of board members,

provided the opportunity for engagement in a non-threatening manner. He also described less-formal events, such as lunches with donors in the university cafeteria or attendance at sporting events. He said, "We try to make some of those opportunities not the slightest bit threatening as an easy way for people to get plugged in."

Existing Relationships. In contrast, existing relationships appeared to be managed within the stewardship practices structure, varying by the specific donor. One participant referenced non-threatening events or sporting competitions as possibly being most appropriate for existing relationships. Brad, the university president, shared about larger events used to engage with existing donors. He described that while others were eating, he and his wife would walk around the room to greet donors. He explained how the team always prepared him beforehand so he knew who would be in attendance at these events. They would also accompany him around the room, directing him to specific attendees with whom he needed to engage.

Brad mentioned that in order to manage these existing donor relationships, collaboration with the development team was necessary to determine how to best engage with current donors. He described this preparation process:

> I try to make sure that the team that I'm working with stay on top of what I need
> to do. And they put it in the calendar; call this person, or write a letter. I do birthday cards
> every month to our key donors and I do them at the beginning of the month and put a
> personal note in there for them. I try to be as personable as I can, so no donor
> feels like, "I'm getting some kind of form treatment.

A number of participants indicated that Western University's history of long tenured development officers, combined with their focus on long-term relationships, created "relational equity" with donors, which resulted in successful fundraising.

Theme 7: The Impact and Influence of Faith on the Fundraising Process

The final primary theme that emerged was the impact and influence of faith on the fundraising process. As a faith-based organization, Western University's reliance on, and belief in, the power of God and faith in the fundraising process were evident in every interview. This theme was encapsulated by one participant who stated, "It's about people and their hearts being moved by the Lord and their hearts being moved to give sacrificially towards a cause or a mission." Every participant expressed a similar perspective, reiterating a reliance on God to provide for the needs of their organization and on the work of the Holy Spirit to move individual donors to act.

Although Western University has a strong operational fundraising system and uses robust measures and accountabilities, one participant emphasized this is insufficient. According to Alan,

We don't want to be so metrics driven that we're no longer trusting on God. We are all about the data, but we also want to make sure that we're paying attention to the details and monitoring our progress and adjusting strategy, but ultimately trusting God for the outcome.

The work of the Holy Spirit was a theme present in responses from nearly all of the participants. Alan said, "We have a board of trustees who firmly believe in, and recognize that it's the Holy Spirit moving in the heart of the donor that prompts them to give." The work of the Holy Spirit could not be scientifically demonstrated but it was evident in and through the participants as they shared their belief in the dependence of God, through the Holy Spirit, to prompt donors to give in support of the institution's needs.

Peter attempted to explain how he saw the development team's reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit; he commented, "They do all of that with excellence, but I think they do that in

conjunction with the Holy Spirit's leading and using that as a guide and never pressuring – never focusing just on the numbers." Clear throughout the interviews was that Western University sees a direct correlation between their fundraising success and their reliance on God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Holly mentioned this as a unique characteristic found in faith-based organizations.

Western University's president, Brad, emphasized that a significant aspect of the influence of faith on fundraising was the practice of staying true to their Christ-centered mission. He said, "Stay faithful to your mission, you're going to have more students, more donors, more supporters. It's a counterintuitive thing. I think that is key for us. We're still committed to the authority of scripture." Although this comment was specifically about faith related to fundraising, it also seemed to point to faith and Christ-centeredness as a key component of Western University's mission and vision.

Conclusion: Case 1

According to the participants in the six interviews in the first case study, the fundraising success of Western University is connected to seven primary themes: vision and mission, use of the president, stewardship practices, personal character traits, operational characteristics, relationships, and the impact and influence of faith on the fundraising process. Vision and mission pointed donors to the organization's purpose for existing and its need for funding to accomplish that mission. Use of the president represented an engaged and involved senior leader willing to invest time in the work of philanthropy by actively fundraising. Stewardship practices included the specific process and means used by Western University to thank and recognize donors. Personal character traits represented the ways in which development officers demonstrated integrity and ethical behavior as they performed their work. Operational

characteristics were valuable metrics and tools used by Western University to measure success. Relationships included strategies to engage internal and external donors as well as prospective donors in the fundraising process. The impact and influence of faith on the fundraising process represented the final theme and demonstrated Western University's deeply held belief in God and their reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit in their fundraising activities. Each theme had a demonstrable impact on Western University's ability to raise the funds necessary to achieve their institutional goals.

Case Study 2: South East University

South East University (a pseudonym) is an Evangelical Christian university in the southeastern region of the United States with an undergraduate student population of approximately 3,700 students. The institution is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and received a "B" Forbes financial rating and has over $500 million in estimated land assets. The university recently hired new advancement leadership, pivoting from a president-led fundraising model to greater dependence on an advancement team model. The advancement team is undergoing a period of restructuring as they prepare for the next chapter in their university's journey.

Discussion of the Sample

Participants were selected based on their relationship to the institution; they included the university president, the vice president for development, four senior university development staff, and externally connected university volunteers. Interviews were conducted in February and March 2021, and each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. Due to the need to protect the identities of each subject, pseudonyms were used. The researcher maintained detailed interview notes including interview date, time, and the pseudonym assigned to each subject.

Case Study Themes

Interview data was entered into MAXQDA for the purpose of sorting and analyzing

participant responses to the 14-question interview protocol (see Appendix B). The data was

coded into themes discovered throughout the six interviews, resulting in five primary themes,

with nine or more quotes associated with each theme code.

Five primary themes emerged, with participants indicating consensus in the importance

of these themes to South East University's fundraising success. A summary of the themes is

provided in Table 2. Each theme will be described later in this chapter.

Table 2

Themes: Successful Fundraising at South East University

Primary Themes Present
Community Partnerships/Connecting the University to the Community
Stewardship and Donor Recognition
Storytelling
Systems/Data/Metrics
Role and Vision of the President

Theme 1: Community Partnerships and Connecting the University to the Community

The theme of community partnerships and connecting the university to the community

was present in the majority of the interviews, making it one of the two broadest themes in this

case study. The concept of connecting the institution to the local people and businesses, and

developing partnerships within those groups, was expressed by participants in several different

ways. However, respondents consistently referenced the importance of engaging the community

surrounding the university. Most participants focused on the intentional outreach of the

university, such as outreach to local companies, organizations, and city leaders. However, this

effort also included outreach by current students through internships, career exploration, and community service projects.

A number of participants emphasized the institution's vision for the future as significant in engaging the community in greater partnership opportunities. Executing this vision and/or the determining the impact of the vision on institutional fundraising seemed to coincide with the new president and a new model for fundraising. For example, although a few participants praised the fundraising ability of the former president, including successful engagement with the community and solicitation of donations in support of the vision and mission, respondents also indicated enthusiasm about a broader and more strategic framework being established by the new president.

Denise, South East University's current president, shared insights about this new approach, specifically, the ever-developing relationship between the institution, the cultural and arts community, and local corporations. Denise described a growth plan designed to reinvent the concept of public-private partnerships, and increasing opportunities for the university to expand its geographical footprint and facilities with wide-ranging partners. In describing the university's opportunities, she said:

> We are actually transforming the downtown area into this whole arts-culture education
> district with the city. I think being seen as a real partner in the city and community is very
> important in that regard. I love to be in the heart and soul of city.

Developing these mutually beneficial relationships between South East University and the surrounding community organizations and companies seemed to be important to all of the participants; it appeared to be a priority moving forward.

The social and cultural scene in the university's surrounding geographic area seemed to impact community relations and partnerships. Mark, a university board member, shared that the university's former president was able to raise funds for the institution but had struggled to penetrate the vast wealth within the community; his reach was limited to close friends and donors. In comparison, Mark saw the new president and advancement leadership as more strategic in their outreach to new segments of the community. According to Mark and other participants, this outreach generated excitement and new partnership opportunities intentionally designed to spur growth.

Multiple participants mentioned intentional outreach efforts toward the highly affluent community surrounding the institution, and specifically to local social clubs, that would significantly expand South East University's engagement with a wider segment of the population. As South East plans for the future, participants seemed to believe these opportunities could help propel the university's mission and long-term vision for growth.

Interview subjects almost universally expressed a desire for the institution to be well-regarded in their community. They seemed to feel that if this were true, the community would support the school financially and would also provide internships, job opportunities, and partnership resources for the university. There appeared to be a common belief that the university was a valuable asset to the local community but more needed to be done to raise the community's awareness of the institution and its value.

Theme 2: Stewardship and Donor Recognition

Half of the interview participants referred to the primary theme of stewardship and donor recognition, and it was mentioned in 13 individual statements. Based on the interviews, participants viewed stewardship as the appropriate institutional response to a donation, the act of

expressing gratitude to a donor. In contrast, donor recognition was a strategic and occasionally transactional institutional recognition of the donor. Participants also emphasized the importance of being aware of donor preferences, and that not all donors expected or wanted recognition.

According to Lisa, the vice president for development, donor recognition was a key focus for South East's development team. She had extensive experience in recognition programs from a former institution and believed that the ability to segment and publicly recognize donors was important in the fundraising process and needed to be increased at South East University.

A number of participants were particularly excited about the "president's circles," in which donors made annual contributions, at varying levels, and subsequently received differing levels of recognition and invitations to various events. Participants expressed the belief that donors in the president's circles appreciated the opportunities to gather inside information, gain access to the president, and participate in exclusive events, such as dinners or retreats. As stated by Terry, a university board member, "When you achieve a certain level of giving, you're recognized." Participants also expressed that having annual president's circles membership programs provided the development team regular opportunities to engage with donors and seek ongoing and/or increased support.

Participants were generally enthusiastic about the idea of donor giving circles and expressed overall support for the development team's efforts to create donor recognition at varying levels; however, a few respondents cautioned that the preferences of the donors be respected. Mark, a university board member, spoke of his own giving and a desire to increase his investment at South East University over time. Yet, it was clear that his involvement was not necessarily tied to recognition but was more deeply connected to the university's vision and

mission. Similarly, other participants cautioned that some donors did not desire overt recognition from the institution, and they urged South East to be mindful of this fact.

Differentiated from the recognition aspect of donor giving, stewardship was defined by participants as expressing thanks to a donor for their investment in the university. Participants identified thanking donors repeatedly and in various ways as a key stewardship practice. In her interview, Lisa described the use of holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Valentine's Day, as natural times to send cards of thanks and appreciation. Lisa clearly noted that expressing gratitude should be widespread and not limited to a few specific donors. She gave an example of an appreciation event its donor invitation list. Her team debated the breadth of the list; she advised them that she would rather see more – not less – people invited to a stewardship and recognition event. Lisa felt these events were the institution's opportunity to thank donors well. Other participants responded similarly, expressing the desire to strategically and authentically express appreciation for donor generosity.

Theme 3: Storytelling

The primary theme of storytelling emerged in South East University's ability to clearly show a relationship between its mission and various outcomes. This theme was coded in 12 separate quotations. The act of storytelling was used in the philanthropic process to provide donor updates and connect the value of a donor's investment to a particular project. For example, stories described the impact specific gifts had on individual students and their educational journeys.

Storytelling appeared to be perceived as a valuable tool used to share South East University's "vision for the future," providing donors with a clear picture of institutional needs and the ways in which their investments could help achieve that vision. The theme can be broken

down into two subthemes. The first sub-theme, relational storytelling, provided specific information about a particular subject to donors or donor prospects with the desired outcome of driving deeper relationship connections and financial support. The second sub-theme, general storytelling, shared higher-level messages with larger audiences. This style of storytelling was used to increase community awareness and to provide general university updates to a greater constituent pool.

Relational Storytelling. According to participants, the "special sauce" of South East University is their unique story. Interview respondents seemed to believe that if people understood how the institution was founded, how it has grown, and how students and graduates in the local community and around the world are making a difference, they would desire a deeper connection with South East – and perhaps that understanding would result in increased giving. Lisa explained that an important aspect to relational storytelling is the ability to connect the donor to the story of the institution, regardless of delivery platform:

> If we can package that story (and the story is obviously true), we can package our truth
> and make it engaging, and get it to the right audiences and invite them to hear the story
> and contribute to the story, then I think we're going to have really exciting growth.

Participants described target marketing and the ability to segment donors as paramount to this relational storytelling process. Jim, as the marketing and communications leader, managed the university's storytelling operations. He spoke of both relational and general storytelling, explaining that target marketing was the most effective means of communicating with donors. According to participants, segmenting messages to individual donors by telling stories of impact and success gave development team members the ability to approach donors to seek additional support for university priorities. A number of means and platforms were suggested for telling

these stories to engage donors, including social media, the university's website, and/or targeted emails.

Nearly all of the participants expressed the value of being able to clearly articulate the university's mission and vision with prospective donors. They noted that development team members needed to be able to "story" the institutions' priorities effectively. Denise shared her excitement at being able to share the story of South East's vision for the future; she provided several examples of storytelling with community contacts and prospective donors, which she believed would encourage them to partner with the university. She was optimistic about the possibility of expanding the university's reach into the highly affluent community surrounding the school and believed there was a large, untapped resource of potential donors unfamiliar with the institution.

General Storytelling. Differentiated from the relational storytelling strategy, participants referenced work around high-level institutional storytelling for updating and awareness purposes. Jim, a university leader provided examples of how South East uses general storytelling to advance the mission of the university. He talked of "drip marketing" campaigns in which the university used a cadence of regular and constant messaging about institutional priorities to reach a much larger audience of current and prospective donors. He also spoke to general storytelling related to fundraising and capital campaigns:

> I actually think building the story or bringing community around whatever that common fundraising goal is, is a success. Especially if you're launching a campaign and you're bringing an awareness to the university or the cause, or whatever that is that maybe wasn't known before. If you get people talking about something and you get them jazzed about something that prior to your campaign, they may not have known about. I think

that's a success.

However, the use of general storytelling appeared to be a work in progress as the development team sought ways to more regularly message their alumni, donors, and the greater university community. According to one participant, South East had only recently sent their first mass email to the community and planned to use this tool in the future.

Finally, participants briefly referenced monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of stories and platforms. Jim spoke to how the team monitored storytelling analytics – communication tools the university used for messaging. He felt that the university's ability to track what specific stories people were opening, reading, and clicking through would provide greater opportunities for focused storytelling through a process of segmentation to prospective donors. He saw this as a great opportunity to hone the university's messaging based on donor preference and affinity, and he felt it would increase donor connectivity to South East, providing new fundraising opportunities.

Theme 4: Systems/Data/Metrics

The primary theme of systems/data/metrics was the combination of two sub-themes that emerged in the coding process. Systems and data were coded in one theme with the addition of a metrics theme. The researcher combined these two sub-themes as it became clear they were interrelated.

Systems and Data. Systems and data referred to 10 different participant responses throughout the six interviews, referencing tools used to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the fundraising process. Specifically, interviewees referenced general donor management systems and electronic communications platforms.

The system referenced most frequently was the general donor management system, Raisers Edge, which participants described as a tool used by many fundraising shops to manage data, plan fundraising activities, track donor gifts, and plan donor "moves management," which is the process of moving a donor from initial contact to greater engagement.

Additional systems mentioned included electronic communication platforms that provided constituent messages and allowed for data mining to track the click rates and specific stories accessed by readers. Participants also emphasized the importance of electronic media – in particular, social media and mass emailing – to communicate with donors and donor prospects.

The term "data" was used by participants to describe the quantification of information collected. This information included the number of donors being tracked by the institution, the number of givers and gift amounts, successful donor email contacts, and other development staff "next steps."

Multiple participants mentioned the need to track how the institution connected with their alumni population and called for focused marketing. Respondents also talked about the importance of observing donors' affinity for giving and their actual gifts over time. Participants seemed to believe that the systems and data collection process would provide opportunities to approach donor prospects in a more personalized manner. They also indicated that this personalization would increase donor excitement for university priorities.

Metrics. The sub-theme of metrics was less clear and was referenced more conceptually. For example, Denise, the university president, and Terry, a board member referred to the need for metrics to track the advancement team's progress toward fundraising goals. Tom, a board member gave an example of the use of metrics:

For example, the annual fund – making sure you're measuring and matching the alumni

giving as a comparison of its growth and the growth in cumulative. Alumni, I think, is a

really interesting metric, especially for a relatively young institution.

He believed that by tracking specific metrics related to South East's alumni population, the

institution would be able to more effectively engage their constituents.

In contrast, Denise, President of South East, referred to metrics in a different context,

pointing to their use to measure the success and performance of fundraising team members.

According to Denise, by reviewing metrics the institution would be able to determine if team

members were achieving their goals or if they needed coaching, or a change of vocation. A

number of participants expressed that the development team needed to use metrics to measure

individual and team progress. Interviews seemed to suggest that the new ways of tracking team

activity could enhance overall performance.

Theme 5: Role and Vision of the President

Finally, the primary theme of the role and vision of the president, arose from and

impacted the other four primary themes. The role of the president as well as South East

University's vision were interwoven throughout all six participant interviews. According to

participants, the president's "strong" vision for South East University was transformative. "I

believe we're going to define a vision that's going to be so compelling that it is going to

transform our university into a really helpful witness for God." Additionally, Tom stated:

The way to compress time is to have a vision that is so overwhelming that you don't even

have to sell it. You just broadcast it, and people see it, and they get excited about it.

This vision was presented in a concise and compelling manner by Denise, president of

South East University, as she explained that her vision included partnerships, innovative growth,

dynamic facilities, focused programming, and community impact. She also referenced some

strategic aspects of the vision, describing aspects of exponential growth through leveraging

capital assets and programmatic offerings. She also mentioned that South East's geographical

location provided an opportunity to connect with high-wealth investors, and connecting with

those people and/or businesses could lead to rapid growth for the university.

On a similarly tactical level, other participants emphasized both the vision of the

president as well as the use the president when reaching out to prospective donors. According to

participants, the use of the president in presenting the university vision ensures the proper level

of "gravitas" so as to entice investment and partnership. Tom encapsulated the topic of

presidential action and vision:

I think it's vision oriented, and if you have a great vision to share, there will be people

that will embrace that vision and then be willing to participate in it. Whether they use

their time, talent, or their treasure. I think the tool is a vision that attracts people to want

to be part of it. That to me is a simple tool.

Every participant expressed an excitement for the leadership of the new president,

Denise. They believed she had a compelling vision and had the ability to lead the institution well.

Participants also expressed a desire to see the fundraising team become more effective as they

leveraged the president to connect with new donor prospects in their high-wealth community. All

of them expressed unity in support of the schools' vision to deeply impact their community and

be seen as a valuable local resource.

Conclusion: Case 2

According to the participants in six interviews conducted for the second case study, the

fundraising success of South East University is connected to five primary themes: community

partnerships and connecting the university to the community, stewardship and donor recognition,

storytelling, systems/data/metrics, and role and vision of the president. Community partnerships and connecting the university to the community was important to South East University as they expressed an overwhelming desire to be seen as a valuable resource in the city and surrounding areas. They felt that connection and engagement with the community would drive new partnership opportunities as well as new donor investments.

Stewardship and donor recognition was best represented by Lisa the vice president for development, and her desire to bring intentional donor recognition, such as the president's circles, to the university. Additionally, the concept of stewarding donors and thanking them for their investment were seen as important to fundraising success.

Storytelling was another important aspect of South East's fundraising as it pointed to how they engaged donors in personal and relational ways, and how they communicated to larger constituent audiences. South East placed value on ensuring donors had the right information and they used storytelling as a key tool in this process.

Systems/data/metrics referred to the tools used to measure successful fundraising. Participants seemed to believe that monitoring data and metrics provided an opportunity to gauge success and make changes to ensure future success.

Finally, role and vision of the president provided a macro-level overview of the president's leadership of the institution and her drive to transform the organization. It also demonstrated their belief that a compelling vision would attract new university investors and philanthropic dollars.

Case Study 3: Midwest University

Midwest University (a pseudonym) is an Evangelical Christian university in the central region of the United States with an undergraduate student population of approximately 2,400

undergraduate students. The institution is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Midwest University placed in the top one-third in the national liberal arts college category by *U.S. News & World Report*, received an "A" Forbes financial ratings with an endowment in excess of $500 million dollars.

Discussion of the Sample

Participants were selected based on their relationship to the institution and included the university president, the vice president for development, four senior university development staff, and externally connected university volunteers. Interviews were conducted in March of 2021 and each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. Due to the need to protect the identities of each subject, pseudonyms were used. The researcher maintained detailed interview notes including interview date, time, and pseudonym assigned to each subject.

Case Study Themes

Interview data was entered into MAXQDA for the purpose of sorting and analyzing the participant responses to a 14-question protocol (see Appendix B). The data was coded into themes discovered throughout the six interviews, resulting in seven primary themes, with 10 or more quotes associated with each theme code. A summary of the themes is provided in Table 3. Each theme will be described later in this chapter.

Table 3

Themes: Successful Fundraising at Midwest University

Primary Themes Present
Metrics/Systems/Goal Setting
Communication and Storytelling
Relationships and Relationships Building
Fundraising Strategies
Use of the President
Vision and Mission
Events

Theme 1: Metrics/Systems/Goal Setting

The theme of metrics/systems/goal setting was present in nearly all of the interviews, making it the broadest and most complex theme to analyze in this case study; this theme contained over 28 individual statements. Each section of this theme was broken down into sub-themes for analysis. In general, this theme encapsulated the ways in which Midwest University measured team and individual development officer performance, set individual and team goals, used systems to track important information, and conducted donor prospect research.

Metrics. The sub-theme of metrics encapsulated the measurements used by Midwest University to numerically quantify the performance of its development staff members as well as the overall data points used to determine the development team's success. Metrics were most specifically referenced regarding the activity and work results of development officers. Midwest University's president and other senior leaders all considered metrics to be important for accountability and to more broadly measure success over time.

Some participants focused on the use of metrics to forecast university fundraising and finances, while other interview respondents focused more specifically on individual and advancement team performance. One participant, Kyle, the vice president of development,

explained that he entered fundraising from a business background and was accustomed to having key performance metrics used to measure individual and team performance. He further suggested that metrics brought an element of honesty to the process of fundraising:

> We also have to have goals and we have to make sure that we're paying attention to what activities in which we are getting engaged. Whether that's proposals given, or whatever, what are the activities we're engaging in, and what are the outcomes, and how do we measure those?

However, Kyle also noted that metrics were not a "perfect indicator" of success and other variables were considered. As an example, he said his development team members were assigned to regions across the country and that all regions did not have the same capacity to raise funds. Therefore, the absolute results from one region might not be as great as another region. Thus, metrics may not necessarily indicate success when compared from region to region.

Kayden, a development team leader, agreed with Kyle's assessment that metrics only told part of the story. Kayden alluded to the fact that expectations vary from region to region. Kayden regularly met with development team members to discuss their metrics and performance, but he based those reviews on metrics designed specifically for the region in question. He described the process he used:

> I meet with each regional director once a month or I have an associate director who also meets with a few of the regional directors and together we'll review their numbers and talk about if those numbers are an accurate reflection of the visits, the proposals, and the dollars coming in.

In contrast, other participants used metrics to measure professional development among individuals and the advancement team. For example, Tom, a development team leader, stated

that he used metrics to come alongside development officers who seem to be struggling in an attempt to determine how to help them achieve success.

According to participants, examples of metrics important to Midwest University included open and click-through rates for constituent emails, the number of donor meetings, visits, and interactions, and the number of proposals presented to donors for consideration. However, Kayden quickly stated, "Dollars are a lagging indicator," denoting that the receipt of philanthropic gifts may not be immediate; thus, Midwest's focus on other metrics. Larry, another development leader, mentioned other metrics including proposal closures, discovery visits, engagement visits, planned gift conversations, and planned gifts. Midwest provided numerous metrics used by regional leaders to measure individual and team performance.

Systems. The sub-theme systems referred to the tools used to measure or collect data. Midwest University respondents described robust and highly sophisticated data collection and donor prospect research capabilities. Several respondents mentioned the ability to gather data from researchers that could be used to measure prospective donor affinity or donative capacity, and to improve tracked donor contacts. In one example, the collection of new parent information created an opportunity for Midwest University to interact with parents who might be capable of making transformational gifts to the institution. Another participant offered the example of their software platform, which provided the opportunity to track and remind donors of the impact their gifts made in the past, and provided another contact point with givers.

Various participants described the work of Midwest University's prospect research team, which mined data to determine wealth screening and demographical data points. According to one participant, Larry, a development leader, the data team collected this information for a database and then independently verified the information and assets. The team employed target

scoring and behavior information to give development officers new insights into where an opportunity might exist with a particular donor prospect. Larry felt this process was valuable to the university because it allowed them to focus their efforts in areas of greatest opportunity.

Goal Setting. While related to metrics, goal setting was distinctly different in that it was the iterative process of determining which outcomes would be measured in the fundraising process. According to participants, goal setting occurred for both individual employees and for geographic regions.

Kayden, a development leader, explained the process of the development officer setting annual goals and developing a business plan for the upcoming year. Team members then shared their regional plans with the larger group in detail. Kayden stated:

> They will talk about what some of the advantages and the disadvantages that are occurring in their region. They share some key events they plan to tap into, and some key donors that are going to focus on. They actually put together a list of their top 50 proposals for the year and a two or three step strategy of some next steps for each one of those top 50. Each of them will define their own strategy and then we'll take some time to critique it and to ask questions - to help sharpen it a bit.

The process of setting different business plans for each of Midwest University's eight regions was identified as an important step in the process of ensuring development officers were engaged in the fundraising planning process; it also ensured achievable goals were set for each regional fundraiser, based upon the unique characteristics of each region. Kayden posited that this process ensured development officers were "setting up and measuring up against their own goal setting."

Theme 2: Communication and Storytelling

Communication and storytelling was a prominent theme emerging from all six interviews. Participants emphasized the ability to share stories showing the impact and outcomes of Midwest University; these stories were considered crucial to the fundraising process. Participants also described experiences of learning and communicating stories they believed to be most effective with various stakeholders.

Several respondents indicated that a development professional's ability to communicate effectively was vital to successful fundraising. Although not identified as a "key trait," nonetheless, the ability to communicate the right messages to the right audiences at the right time was a clear focus in nearly all of the interviews.

Further, the majority of respondents emphasized one aspect of communication, the art of storytelling, as crucial to fundraising. According to participants, storytelling was the best way to contextualize messages for individual donors. Interview respondents indicated that a story told well would elicit an emotional response from donors as they resonated with its message. One participant, Kyle, vice president for development also believed that the stories Midwest's development officers shared were unique and thus were uniquely able to influence donors to consider giving to the university. He stated:

> What we're doing here is having an impact on the kingdom, as well as having an impact on individuals. Within that overall story of mission and purpose, the individual narratives play out; whether it's a student who's here, who possibly couldn't be here without a full ride scholarship because of their lack of wealth, or it's a recent grad, who's having an impact in a COVID-19 environment that no one else can, or a scholar that's written a book that no one else has written and it is getting rave reviews and having a huge impact.

Those narrative stories are still the most important.

Regarding the ability to be a storyteller, Paul, the university's president, stated that development officers need to be on campus regularly because "a development officer is most effective when they have their own stories to tell about a campus community and not just other people's stories to tell."

In the interview, Paul indicated that if development officers were on campus, they would have the opportunity to interact with professors and students, gaining firsthand knowledge of Midwest's impact. He also felt this would most effectively and naturally allow them to bring their knowledge and findings into conversations with donors.

Several respondents described storytelling as a primary communication tool used on various platforms. For instance, Kyle referred to newsletters, direct emails, videos, and social media platforms being used to tell the story of Midwest University. He felt this type of communication allowed the development team to contextualize their messaging as they focused on specific segments of the greater Midwest University community. Storytelling also provided an opportunity for the university president to connect with a donor through a variety of communication platforms. He specifically mentioned broadcast events where the president answered questions from constituents concerning issues pertinent to the university.

Regarding more general communications, participants referenced the use of written materials as "launching pads" for donor conversations. Kyle indicated that infographics seemed to be more powerful than written communication as they created pictorial images of the data. Evidenced in the interviews, Midwest University used storytelling on numerous platforms, in both written and electronic communication, to message to their constituents; these efforts created opportunities for continued engagement with the development team.

Theme 3: Relationships and Relationship Building

The significance of the process of building relationships with donors was expressed by each of the six respondents who referred directly or alluded to the absolute impact of authentic donor relationships. Within this theme of relationships and relationship building, the codes of relationships, relationship building, and trust, were identified in at least 29 separate quotations throughout the six interviews. Sub-themes that emerged included developing deep relationships, pastoral role, and trust.

Developing Deep Relationships. At Midwest University, developing relationships seemed to be a sincere and prioritized objective, but not only for the purpose of fundraising. Paul, the university president, specifically emphasized that their focus on relationship building was not manipulative. Numerous participants provided examples of deeply authentic, longitudinal relationships. Kyle, vice president for development described one example of deep and developing relationships: Shortly after Covid-19 struck in March 2020, his team of development professionals stopped raising funds and instead, they began to reach out to donors and constituents throughout their community and portfolio. He said:

> We were just going to call our significant donors and other key constituents to just check
>
> in on them, and pray with them, and ask what things to pray with them about.

He was emphatic that the only purpose of the calls was to genuinely care for the well-being of Midwest University's constituents. His contention was demonstrated by the acts of concern and true relationship modeled by the development team during the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Participants described many different means to organically connect with donors. Tom, a development leader, explained that he called donors whenever they came to mind, simply to

greet them and let them know he was praying for them. Other participants shared that donors would proactively call them, to inquire about their children or their well-being. It was evident in nearly all of the interviews that a special depth of relationship – in both directions – existed between many of Midwest University's development officers and donors. Larry called it being involved in and knowing "the peripheral details of a donor's life."

Although participants indicated many different spontaneous and organic connection points, they also described a systemic process for identifying, tracking, and following up on key events in the life of a donor. For instance, one participant tracked the birthdates, anniversaries, and other important dates of his donors to ensure he sent cards or other items to mark the special days. According to participants, this process was not calculated but done out of a genuine sense of caring.

As participants reflected on how these meaningful relationships developed, a few of the respondents stated that advancement officer longevity mattered. Interview participants clearly communicated that in order for deep and meaningful relationships to grow and flourish, the parties needed to get to know one another over a period of time. Though no participants indicated an exact length of time, they seemed to believe that part of their team's success was the result of long tenures among their development officers. According to the interview respondents, longevity fostered trust, which produced deep relationship. This relationship was evidenced in a story shared by Tom, a development leader, as he journeyed through life with a donor. Tom described the donor's long process of caring for an ailing spouse, the death of the spouse, and the donor's eventual new marriage. As Tom shared this personal story, it was clear that the foundation to this donative relationship was not money, but was much more personal, suggesting trust, care, and concern.

Pastoral Role. Another sub-theme reflecting the personal aspect of deep relationships were the participants' thoughts on development officers functioning in a pastoral role. A number of participants indicated that development work was similar to that of a pastor, in that the engagement is predicated upon deep care, grounded in faith. One participant, Paul, Midwest's president, referred to this as "seeking first of all to minister to [donors]." Another participant, Kyle, vice president for development extended this comparison: "I do think you need a pastoral heart, and not only a pastoral heart, but a functioning knowledge of theological issues."

Trust. A final and significant sub-theme of developing deep relationships was trust. One participant described this trust as "complete transparency," in the fundraising process. Participants mentioned that they strive to be open and honest with donors and prospective donors about the reasons for their visits; they would never want donors to question the reason for a meeting.

Interview respondents offered several examples of how this transparency was practiced. Kayden, a development leader, specifically shared about working with elderly donors; he stated that Midwest University desired to ensure that both prospective donors and their families were aware of the interactions to ensure transparency and build trust; at times, adult children and other family members were invited to join the conversations with older prospective donors. Kyle stated that the ability to demonstrate integrity to a family is important. Another participant, Kevin, summed up the subtheme of trust: "Building trust is so important for what we do. And sometimes that involves having a long-term approach."

Theme 4: Fundraising Strategies

The primary theme of fundraising strategies consisted of 14 individual quotes discovered in half of the interviews and represented the processes and internal workings of the development

team at Midwest University. In addition, Midwest University provided its *Regional Director Manual*, which the researcher reviewed as supporting documentation. The manual contained a comprehensive overview of the institution's fundraising process, methodology, and specific fundraising protocols, as well as regional business planning and strategies.

Paul, Midwest's president, was very succinct in his assessment of their fundraising; he wanted to know the team's "winning strategy." He was also clear that simply hoping for success was insufficient: "Hope is not a strategy." Instead, Midwest University appeared to have a very intentional and organized strategy for fundraising. The *Regional Director Manual* provided development team members an overview of the institution, institutional priorities, basic information for developing a regional business plan, direction for event planning, and an overview of gift types. The document also contained a section on performance tracking and metrics. The detail to which Midwest University documented their fundraising operations was significantly advanced and comprehensive, including 72-page manual delineating fundraising operations for their regional directors.

Interview respondents either directly referenced fundraising strategy, as outlined in the *Regional Director Manual*, or they spoke about fundraising strategy more conceptually. The participants described the value of meeting annually with development teammates from Midwest University to share their individual regional business plans and to solicit feedback and suggestions. One participant, Larry, a development team leader who had joined Midwest University from the nonprofit sector, found these meetings and the team partnerships to be very valuable; he said much of what he learned about fundraising was done in partnership with his peers.

The materials and interviews demonstrated that Midwest University did not have a single specific fundraising strategy, but instead had eight individual regional strategies designed to maximize the donors, donor prospects, and opportunities in each region. Midwest University employed the primary theme of metrics/systems/goal setting in their eight-pronged regional fundraising strategy.

Theme 5: Use of the President

the primary theme of the use or value of the president emerged from 13 direct quotes in three different interviews. More than any other interview respondent, Paul, the president of Midwest, referred to the ways in which the development team leveraged him in fundraising. But according to the interviews, both Paul and the development team conveyed how he was a uniquely valuable resource to the university and its fundraising process.

In the interviews, the president of Midwest represented himself as the chief advancement officer and university ambassador. Paul indicated that, foundationally, the most important thing he could do to help the development team was to represent the school well. He said:

> I think the best thing I do for our regional directors is to do the very best job that I can do as being president of our college, because that's going to trickle out, that's going to have an impact on the reputation of the institution.

Paul was aware that as the university's chief advancement officer, constituents looked to him to set the tone and direction for Midwest University, and by doing that well, his development team could conduct their work without distraction. According to Paul, at a recent meeting in which a board of visitors were present, one of Midwest University's faculty members offered unsolicited appreciation for the way in which Paul and his leadership team had led the institution through the pandemic of 2020-2021. Paul described how this type of information flowing to Midwest

University's constituents was of huge value to the organization. Therefore, his work was foundational in creating a positive atmosphere in which the development team could operate.

Not only did the university president establish a tone for fundraising, he also spent a significant amount of time engaged in the process, indicating that approximately 25% of his time went toward fundraising. However, Paul made it clear that he was not responsible for a specific portfolio of donors. Paul believed his role was to come alongside development officers to move relationships forward and not to take away their credit. He stated:

> If I come alongside a regional director, that's all for their stats. I think then there's never a sense of needing to hold onto something that's going to be taken away. It's just not the way we operate at all.

Instead, Paul seemed to rely on the regional directors and development leadership team to decide how best to leverage him to motivate donors or secure gifts.

Interviews with other participants confirmed the importance of the president in the development process. Interview respondents indicated that the president generally met with the development team monthly to review the president's role with donor prospects, and in particular, with transformative gift prospects – those individuals who might be able to make a significant investment in Midwest University. Kayden, development team leader, described transformative gifts as those that usually take a long time to secure and require much patience and presidential involvement.

According to interview participants, the development team also leveraged the president's influence through focused events designed to provide donors and prospective donors access to him. According to Kayden, getting those people in front of the president was a crucial step in securing support. Other participants referenced a variety of events, such as a new parent

breakfast, designed to provide access to the president. Paul described the input the development team had into his schedule each season; the development team requests his presence at regional events and meetings as they collectively deemed appropriate. Paul stated this was a "give and take" process of deciding where to spend his limited time; he wanted to ensure that his time was best used when in a particular region. He also noted those development team meetings were typically a good use of his time in the philanthropic process. As previously mentioned, Midwest University developed online virtual events aimed at engaging the president with the greater Midwest University audience. These intentional connection points created follow-up opportunities for development officers; they also kept the community well informed.

The final way in which the president was used at Midwest University was through critique. Paul described meeting with the development team after events at which he spoke to discuss whether his message was on point. He wanted to know if the information shared was valuable to the audience or if it required fine tuning. Based on participant responses, Paul was not offended by constructive feedback and sought the partnership and critique of his development team in this area. Paul stated:

> How could my comments have been better? Did you think that dragged a little bit? I like inviting that in, so then I think that gives freedom for the whole team to say, "This didn't go as well as it could." I thought that too, and here's what I think could make it better. I think there's an improvement mentality that I think really strengthens us as a team.

The president's intentionality in the fundraising process was evident in his statements and in responses from other Midwest University participants. Throughout the interviews, it was clear

Paul perceived himself to be the chief advancement officer for the institution, and the development team leveraged him as such.

Theme 6: Vision and Mission

The vision and mission of Midwest University was mentioned by five of six respondents. Each participant expressed an understanding of the inextricable connection between the institution's mission and vision, and the fundraising work done to perpetuate the mission and vision. In every interview, the participants emphasized that donors and supporters of Midwest University shared a deep love for the institution's mission. Tom, a development team leader, believed this love for the mission was key to the successful fundraising that Midwest University had experienced over time. Participants seemed to indicate that honoring the mission and vision of Midwest University translated into fundraising practices that demonstrated "excellence" or "biblical stewardship." Kyle, the university vice president for development, stated that his team was expected and desired to conduct their work with excellence, in support of the institution's mission. Similarly, Kim, a university board member, believed that their fundraising should be conducted in a missional way that emulated biblical stewardship. She said:

> I think from a more holistic point of view, I'd hope that we are conducting our fundraising or our whole advancement effort in a way that reflects biblical stewardship values, and that people are giving out of a sense of both serving Christ and advancing his kingdom.

The mission and vision of Midwest University seemed to both inspire and guide the work of the individual officers and the development team as a whole.

More practically, interview respondents also emphasized the function of development officers as defining and interpreting the mission and vision for current and prospective donors.

According to Tom, the work of development officers was to match a donor's affinity to give with a desire to support the mission and vision of the university. He believed fundraising would be most effective if a development officer could help a donor discover that alignment between passion and mission.

Paul, the president of Midwest, believed donors could most effectively experience this, and commit to the vision and mission, by interacting with students and others on campus. This was a big reason for his insistence that regional development officers have on-campus offices so they could interact themselves and be able to share those experiences with donors. Paul summarized his expectation of development officers:

> I like our development team to be "characteristically exemplary" of the mission of our college, of the character, of the Christ-likeness, of the humility, and of the excellence.

> Based on the interviews, Midwest University's mission and vision were obviously core

values in the development team's work. This theme emerged not only in the interviews, but was documented in their *Regional Director Manual* as well. According to Paul, even the student body can speak to the significance of the mission and vision and what they mean to the Midwest University community. The vision and mission has become institutionalized, ingrained in the ethos and culture of the university, and therefore assists in the fundraising process.

Theme 7: Events

The final primary theme that emerged in the third Midwest University case study interviews was events. The *Regional Director Manual* documented at least 11 formal events designed to engage donors, parents, alumni, or other constituents. Midwest appeared to leverage events both locally on campus as well and regionally (the exception being during the global pandemic). The manual stated that development officer attendance at these events was highly

encouraged; the events were tools to engage donors. According to participant responses, regional

directors worked in concert with the president to determine how to best leverage the president at

these events to have the greatest impact on specific donors in the fundraising process.

According to interview participants, events were also used to introduce the president and

institution to new parents and potential prospective donors. Multiple interview respondents

shared the example of a breakfast event, held during orientation, designed to engage a smaller

population of new parents who might be capable of making significant investments at Midwest

University. Larry, a development team leader, described the parent orientation event:

> Hey, we know you. You're here at this special breakfast because we see that you are
>
> leaders in your fields and your communities. We want you to feel like you have
>
> an opportunity to be engaged as parents – in a sense of leadership with us here at the
>
> college.

Larry summarized this strategy stating, "So, we lay the groundwork during those four years, and

sometimes parents are very quick to become donors."

Another type of regular events described in the interviews related to engaging alumni.

According to Kim, a Midwest University board member, the university's alumni association

welcomed new members into their ranks through intentional engagement that created

opportunities for Midwest to solicit new partners and donors. She referred to the success of class

reunions as another example of alumni events designed to engage a larger group of potential

donors.

In addition to these regular events, Paul, the president of Midwest University, spoke to

the value of special events related to capital campaigns. He also emphasized how donor

expectations might differ for these events, perhaps elevated, especially when directly connected to major campaigns.

Midwest University uses its event strategy as a conduit for the communication, relationship building, and philanthropic process. Events are not done in a vacuum, but rather as part of a larger strategy to purposely engage community members with the president or other people within the university. Ultimately, Midwest University see these events as instrumental in sharing their message, mission, and needs, prior to asking attendees to join them as donors.

Conclusion: Case 3

According to the participants in six interviews conducted for the third case study, the fundraising success of Midwest University is connected to seven primary themes: metrics/systems/goal setting, communication and storytelling, relationships and relationship building, fundraising strategies, use of the president, vision and mission, and events. The primary theme of *metrics/systems/goal setting* was important to Midwest University; they expressed a reliance on the use of quantifiable metrics and goal setting to guide their work and lead their regional business planning. Participants expressed how goal setting and metrics were not the only measurement of accomplishment and reminded the researcher that the dollars raised were a lagging indicator of success. The interview respondents indicated having goals for their organization allowed them to honestly assess their success, determine how best to support one another, and further connect successfully with donors.

The primary theme of communication and storytelling was best represented by Kyle, the vice president of development, when he expressed a desire to see storytelling used as the preferred method of showing the impact of Midwest University's activities. His eagerness to

contextualize messages was meant to ensure that every method of communication provided personalized, focused messages to various constituent segments to achieve fundraising success.

The primary theme of relationships and relationship building was represented the ways Midwest University personally and relationally engaged donors. Connections to donors in deep and meaningful ways, anchored in a pastoral role and with trust, were revealed as critical to success. Longstanding development officers developed trusted connections with donors and donor families, creating opportunities for conversations concerning gifts and estate planning.

The primary theme of fundraising strategies demonstrated the purposeful and comprehensive structure within which fundraising occurred at Midwest University. Fundraising strategies encompassed Midwest University's macro approach, most evident in their *Regional Director Manual*, which provided directions for developing regional business plans. Midwest's strategy requiring distinct business plans honed to fit the needs and opportunities in eight separate regional areas proved to be a novel – and compelling – strategy for fundraising segmentation built on geography.

The primary theme of use of the president demonstrated the variety of strategic ways in which Midwest University's fundraising team engaged the president with donors and prospective donors. In individual meetings, virtual and in-person gatherings, and multiple events, the team intentionally leveraged the gravitas of their president, effectively using his time to share the university's message. In a similar way, the university's president sought to create a culture and ethos that would motivate and encourage constituents, ultimately making fundraising easier.

Undergirding the other primary themes, vision and mission was best summarized by Paul, the university president: He expected the development team to be "characteristically exemplary of the organization's mission and vision." The mission and vision were depicted as a source of

motivation for fundraising, but also as a guide for the expectations of how to fundraise – with excellence and demonstrating biblical stewardship.

Finally, events, as a primary theme, defined the logistical platform for the development officers and the president to share the vision, mission, and needs of the organization with constituent members in the hope that they would give to the institution. Even as events were strategically planned and carried out, the other primary themes were integrated into the process; the events amplified the mission and vision of the university, demonstrated effective the use of the president, communicated Midwest University's story, and developed deeper relationships with constituents.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, Implications, Conclusion

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate successful fundraising operations at three small, Christian universities in an attempt to discover the reasons for their successful fundraising operations. Six respondents from each institution were interviewed for a total study population of 18, including the university president, vice president for development, senior development leadership, and organizational volunteer leaders. All interviews were conducted via videoconferencing to account for interaction restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. After multiple data examination sessions, including reviewing interview recordings and interview notes, tertiary documentation, and coding data, 12 general themes emerged representing the success of all three institutions.

Research Question

This study was designed to answer the question, "What are the characteristics of the fundraising operations of three small, private, faith-based institutions that have proven successful, as measured by their current *U.S. News & World Report* and Forbes financial ratings?" Interview questions sought to explore development team structure, training, teamwork and collaboration, as well as fundraiser character traits. Additionally, more theoretical questions regarding successful fundraising and fundraising strategy were examined. Finally, operationally focused questions sought to discover the use of metrics, measurements, communication tools and strategies, and stewardship practices employed by the three institutions. Each of these macro categories were discovered during the interview process and provided insight into the fundraising operations used at the researched universities.

Discussion

As evidenced in the findings, each of the three institutions studied had differing methods of fundraising, however several primary themes were found at all participating institutions. All of the primary themes in this study were found to be under the conceptual framework of relationship management, as postulated by Burnett (1992) which was a donor based approach to fundraising, having a primary focus on people and intimate one-on-one relationships between the donor and fundraiser. Waters (2008), expounded on this theory, to encompass relationship fundraising theory, which became the lexicon for fundraising. Kelly (2000) further postulated that fundraising strategies must include four key elements of stewardship including: (a) reciprocity, which ensured donors were thanked for their gifts by intentional acts of acknowledgment; (b) responsibility, which assured donors that the organization would use gifts in a socially responsible manner – the concept of "keeping promises" (p. 114); (c) reporting, which demonstrated basic accountability to the donors and the organization; and (d) relationship nurturing, which focused on practices that cultivated donor input and feedback. MacQuillian and Sargeant (2016) further expanded this research formulating a theory of relationship fundraising which proved equally poignant to this research as it focused on the necessity of relationships in the fundraising process.

The findings in this study confirm and extend the conceptual framework of relationship management theory. All three institutions demonstrated that relationship management is based in relationship cultivation and development, but that they require more than simply building relationships. This initial research was expanded to show a calculated, strategic, and intentional aspect to relationship management. The expansion of the theory was most evident in

demonstrable and intentional crafting of relationship building by using various tools and processes to achieve the intended results of successful fundraising.

Each university also demonstrated that the research of MacQuillian and Sargeant (2016), which focused on relationship fundraising, embodied their successful fundraising and was an advancement of relationship management theory. However, these institutions also demonstrated more pragmatic and alternative interpretations of relationship management and relational fundraising. The findings indicated how elements of organizational vision and mission, use of the president, stewardship practices, storytelling and communication, and the use of systems, metrics, and data were all core components of their relationship management and donor cultivation, and vital to their success in fundraising.

Vision and Mission

Vision and mission surfaced as a key theme for Western University and Midwest University, and although not a top theme for South East University, it was mentioned by their president and vice president of development. In fact, the focus of all three universities relative to their mission and vision seemed important to the fundraising process. Western University's president stated that mission and vision made fundraising successful. Similarly, Midwest University's president believed that mission and vision, together, were experiential and could be seen in the lives of students and others on campus. Although more conceptually, South East's president painted a visionary picture of her institution growing into a valuable community asset, supported and espoused by their regional community. South East's vice president for development also mentioned their mission and vision as being strong and focused on aspirational institutional goals.

The term "fidelity to mission" was used by Western University to denote how they approached fundraising. This term was not used specifically by the other two institutions but was alluded to through wording such as "advancing kingdom work" or "helpful witness for God." Each of the three institutions has a strong Evangelical foundation and their work to remain true to that foundation was evidenced as important in soliciting donors and partners to join in their mission.

Use of the President

All three institutions strategically used their university presidents to assist in the fundraising process. It is fair to state that each one believed the president to be their figurative chief advancement officer. In all three cases, the president was tasked with connecting with donors and prospective donors. Although the precise ways differed in how these connections were made, it was clear that the intentional use of the president in fundraising was a key in their success. Panas (2010) suggested that the person soliciting a gift must have the respect of the donor. In this case, the president and their "gravitas" would seem to be used by all three institutions to gain that respect.

Western University's president spent up to 40% of his time engaged in the fundraising and relationships building process. He would regularly meet with development team members to strategize how best to engage donors and to use his presidential gravitas. Similarly, South East's president engaged in fundraising work by meeting with donors and prospective community supporters. Midwest University's president indicated heavy engagement in the fundraising process as well; he estimated 25% of his time went toward moving relationships forward and engaging donors in the philanthropic process. Although somewhat different in their fundraising roles, all three presidents served to advance the cause by serving in key fundraising capacities.

Stewardship Practices

Kelly (2000) advanced Waters' (2008) theory by adding that stewardship was second in importance to donor relations. Panas (2010) also focused on stewardship, and specifically the act of recognition as important to a donor. The theme of stewardship was a key and significant theme in interviews with Western and South East universities. It was not a key theme for Midwest University even though members spoke to its value. Common to all of the institutions was the concept of "thanking well" their donors and financial partners. Both Western and South East universities demonstrated a commitment to stewardship in how they described the ways in which they thanked and recognized donors for their generosity.

Comparing their responses to those of Midwest University showed a gap in how stewardship was expressed. It the case of Midwest University, gratefulness seemed to be built into their ethos and it was an expectation that they consistently thank and steward donors. With the other two institutions, a greater emphasis was placed on the design process of stewardship. However, one thing remained clear in all three cases: Good fundraising includes thanking donors well and often. Kelly (2000) theorized that stewardship that led to deeper donor relationships included elements of intentional donor acknowledgment, assurance of the proper use of gifts, accountability, and donor cultivation through constant feedback. Each of these elements were found in the research.

Storytelling and Communication

Storytelling and communication as a key theme was present in only Midwest University and South East University. However, Western University provided tangible examples of how they communicated with donors and told the stories of how their gifts made an impact on the institution. Their stories covered the spectrum: videos of students thanking donors for their

support while conducting a "fly-though" of new science labs; student visits to donor workplaces to express gratitude for scholarships; and student and faculty stories shared online and in print. All three institutions intentionally practiced storytelling as they attempted to effectively communicate their value propositions to constituents and donors. In some cases, such as at Midwest University, the stories were segmented to produce contextualization. In the case of South East University, the storytelling was done through their newly implemented digital email platform. No matter how the storytelling was formatted or disseminated, each university's consistency in sharing their message and need for support was vital to the fundraising process.

Systems, Data, and Metrics

Only two of three institutions, Western University and South East University, had system, data, and metrics as a key theme. This proved interesting as Western University could be considered quite advanced in their fundraising practices. If goal setting and metrics had been less defined in their interviews and combined as one theme, system, data, and metrics could have proven to be a top theme for their institution. The manner in which Western University tracks development officer activity was found to be both complex and useful in determining how to move donors through the process from cultivation to solicitation, and finally, to donation. Additionally, Western University's detailed examination of portfolio penetration and donor segmentation was advanced, displaying many similarities to that of Midwest University. However, respondents did not cite those areas as more important than others listed in the study. It may be they are accustomed to sophisticated systems and do not consider them a luxury or of higher value to the fundraising process, as opposed to an institution such as South East University, which was just beginning to use data-informed metrics in their fundraising plans.

The study clearly indicated that all three universities use metrics, systems, and goal setting as a significant aspect of their fundraising operations and each of them, to one extent or another, rely on data to make informed decisions about their fundraising efforts.

Relationship Development

The development of deep and personal relationships between donor and fundraiser was evident at each of the institutions studied, requiring significant investment of time in the relationship building process. Each institution's ability to leverage relationships as a foundation to discussions regarding philanthropy proved vital to the cultivation of philanthropically minded partners. While South East University did not specifically demonstrate this theme as key to their fundraising practices, their interviews clearly showed that developing and growing relationships was an important aspect to their fundraising process.

It is possible that recent development team transitions at South East University had an impact on responses to questions about relationship development. It may also be that their answers were affected by a new focus on developing expanded relationships with a wider group of prospective donors from their communities. However, in all three cases, there was evidence to suggest relationship development as a key trait in fundraising. The difference would be that two of the three universities saw relationship building as a deeply personal process and one saw it in a broader sense.

Limitations

Institutions for this study were selected through research and evaluation of schools affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), based on their *U.S. News & World Report* and Forbes Financial ratings. These measures were selected for their more generic and objective scoring, representing opinions and rankings from independent third parties.

Although only three universities were selected for study, several additional institutions fit the criteria and could have been selected. However, the researcher chose universities in three different regions of the country to determine whether geographical location played a part in successful fundraising. Additionally, interviews conducted with 18 respondents revealed that some of the subjects did not have accurate information or expertise in areas of interest and thus could not provide detailed answers to several of the questions.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Relationship management theory was confirmed in this study and it was also expanded. The ability to understand both the underlying theory and possible "next steps" in the application of the theory are valuable in successful fundraising.

Implications for Theory

This study showed how varying factors can impact successful fundraising. Relationship management theory was not only confirmed but was expanded upon through intentional relationship building with the ultimate purpose of securing donor support. Understanding the key themes at work in the three institutions in this study should provide similarly small, faith-based institutions with a road map to successful fundraising; the themes point to several specific ways in which other institutions could enhance their fundraising efforts to achieve greater success.

Implication for Practice

The findings of this study suggest that a clear focus on vision and mission is a key to successful fundraising, and that focus is foundational. Organizations would do well to clearly define their mission and vision to donors, and then link those objectives to specific fundraising opportunities. The results consistently demonstrate that donors want to see a clear connection between their philanthropy and an intended outcome. An attentive focus on the mission and

vision of the institution can provide a fundraising team with the anchor from which to build their case. Knowing, understanding, and communicating that mission and vision sets the stage for donors to discover their affinity with the organization, and thereby open the doors to philanthropic support.

Of equal importance to successful fundraising is an organization's ability to leverage and use its president in the process. It is clear that the gravitas associated with donors seeing the senior leader of an institution as the chief development officer is important to fundraising success. However, presidential commitment to the time required for philanthropic work is critical and must be undertaken in a structured and intentional manner.

This study showed that stewardship and an attitude of gratitude for donors and their gifts is vital to the fundraising process; the thanking process can never be overdone. Whether done in small notes of appreciation or large naming events (e.g., designating a campus building with the name of a specific donor), the practice of stewardship must be a regular and ingrained aspect of the fundraising process. As one respondent stated, "We cannot thank someone enough." The practice of showing genuine gratitude also creates an opening for future gifting as donors are moved by the impact their philanthropy has on an organization.

Storytelling and communication create the doorway through which development officers are able to approach donors to discuss the ongoing work on their organizations. The ability to effectively share "stories of impact" will often determine how deeply a donor becomes connected to the fundraising project or to the institution. Donors want to see their dollars in action. Donors say, "Show me." The idea of conceptualized, focused communication benefits the storytelling process as it creates relevance to the audience. The connection built between the

story and the donor can garner new and ongoing support, but stories also demonstrate to current and prospective donors how the institution is a good steward of philanthropic dollars.

No fundraising operation can successfully perform its duties without some type of tracking system, nor can it succeed without individual and team goals and metrics. The ability to set realistic goals, whether personal or organizational, is made possible through the examination of data collected by an organization. Those metrics, such as the number of donor visits and calls or number of funding proposals submitted to donors can also be measured to determine if the organization and its fundraising team members are being effective.

Finally, the process of relationship building cannot be emphasized enough. Intentionally connecting to donors through trusted interaction is critical to fundraising. These interactions cannot be manufactured but must germinate through long-term engagement between a development officer – and others, such as the president and institutional stakeholders – and prospective donors. Although the amount of time required to develop these relationships is not well defined, it is clear that the relationships must be much more than transactional and superficial.

Future Research

Peer reviewed research on fundraising at small, faith-based institutions was a challenge to find. Not many studies have been conducted in this area of higher education. If the premise is true that higher education will face challenging headwinds and require new investments of philanthropic support, additional research should be done to measure two key areas: storytelling, and system, data, and metrics. More research should be done to evaluate the value of delivering highly focused and contextualized – storytelling – messages to segmented donor populations. This could include segmentation between external, non-connected donors, and alumni. In

addition, segmenting alumni by age, graduation year, or college major might point to the best use of contextualized communication in the fundraising process.

With regard to system, metrics, and data, although much information is available, it generally needs further verification and qualification. For example, wealth indicators often show total assets, including real property, and do not adequately analyze liquid wealth. Knowing a prospective donor's actual capacity to give may assist in the fundraising process; it could serve to prequalify or eliminate potential large donors.

Concluding Comments

Fundraising is a complex and rapidly evolving profession. The ability for small, faith-based colleges and universities to successfully raise needed capital for organizational stability, program support and student support, and organizational growth will be critical to their survival. Investing in fundraising operations at a university through systems and tools will provide opportunities for development teams to be more organized and effective. Investment of time in relationship building with new and prospective donors may not yield immediate results, but research indicates that long held relationships will have a positive and enduring impact on a donor's giving practices. The ability to engage the chief executive of the institution and share an organization's message in clear and concise ways will improve its ability to successfully raise funds.

Based on the findings from this exploratory comparative case study research, there are no "silver bullets" for the fundraising process. Each institution had a different culture and personality. However, the results from this study suggest that by replicating a few key strategies, practices, tools, and processes, similar colleges and universities can more effectively achieve their fundraising goals.

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Appendix A

2019 CCCU Comparison Schools - United States and Canada

Information contained in the list was compiled from the Council for Christian Colleges

and Universities (CCCU), Forbes, and *U.S. News & World Report* (Council for Christian

Colleges and Universities [CCCU], n.d.; Forbes, 2018; *U.S. News & World Report,* 2018).

School	Forbes Rating	USN Rating or Note
Abilene Christian University	A	Too large
Ambrose University	n/a	Canada
Anderson University - IN	B	Small Endowment.
Anderson University - SC	D	
Arizona Christian University	No score	
Asbury Theological Seminary	No score	
Asbury University	B	Too small
Azusa Pacific University	D	
Belhaven University	No score	
Bethany Lutheran College	D	
Bethel University - IN	D-	
Bethel University - MN	C	
Biola University	B	185 National / 150Mil endowment.
Bluefield College	C	
Booth University College	n/a	Canada
Briercrest College and Seminary	n/a	Canada

Cairn University	No score	
California Baptist University	C	
Calvin University	B	Large donor exception
Campbellsville University	No score	
Central Christian College of Kansas	B-	
Charleston Southern University	B-	
College of the Ozarks	A+	Too small
Colorado Christian University	B	Too large
Concordia University - NE	No score	
Concordia University - WI	B	Too large
Concordia University Irvine	C	
Corban University	D	
Cornerstone University	C	
Covenant College	B	Too small
Crandall University	n/a	Canada
Crown College	C-	
Dallas Baptist University	B-	
Dallas Theological Seminary	No score	
Denver Seminary	No score	
Dordt University	No score	
East Texas Baptist University	B	Too small
Eastern Nazarene College	C	
Eastern University	C-	

Emmanuel College	C-	
Erskine College	C-	
Evangel University	D	
Faulkner University	D	
Fresno Pacific University	C	
Fuller Theological Seminary	No score	
Geneva College	No score	
George Fox University	C	
Gordon College	C	
Gordon Conwell Seminary	No score	
Grace College & Seminary	C-	
Greenville University	C	
Hannibal-LaGrange University	C	
Hardin-Simmons University	A	Too small
Harding University	C	
Hope International University	B-	
Houghton College	C	
Houston Baptist University	B-	
Howard Payne University	B+	Too small
Huntington University	C-	
Indiana Wesleyan University	B	Too large
John Brown University	B	Large donor exception
Johnson University	A	Too small

Judson College--AL	C	
Judson University	D	
Kentucky Christian University	C	
Kilns College	No score	
King University	C	
Kuyper College	No score	
Lee University	C	
LeTourneau University	C	
Life Pacific University	C-	
Lincoln Christian University	C	
Lipscomb University	C	
Lubbock Christian University	B	Too small
Malone University	D	
McMaster Divinity College	n/a	Canada
Messiah College	B	16th in region / 135Mil endowment
Mid-Atlantic Christian University	C	
MidAmerica Nazarene University	D	
Milligan College	No score	
Mississippi College	C	
Missouri Baptist University	C	
Montreat College	C	
Moody Bible Institute	A-	Unranked
Mount Vernon Nazarene University	B-	

Multnomah University	D	
New Saint Andrews College	No score	
North Central University	B-	
North Park University	B-	
Northwest Christian University	C-	
Northwest Nazarene University	B	Too small
Northwest University	C-	
Northwestern College	B	Too small
Nyack College	D	
Ohio Christian University	B	117th in region
Oklahoma Baptist University	B	Too small
Oklahoma Christian University	C	
Olivet Nazarene University	D	
Oral Roberts University	B	Large donor exception
Ouachita Baptist University	B	Too small
Ozark Christian College	B-	
Palm Beach Atlantic University	B	193 Mil endowment
Point Loma Nazarene University	B-	
Point University	C	
Prairie College	n/a	Canada
Providence Christian College	B-	
Providence University College	n/a	Canada
Redeemer University College	n/a	Canada

Regent University	C	
Roberts Wesleyan College	C	
San Diego Christian College	C-	
Simpson University	C-	
Southeastern University	C	
Southern Nazarene University	C	
Southern Wesleyan University	C	
Southwest Baptist University	C	
Southwestern Christian University	C	
Spring Arbor University	D	
Sterling College	C	
Tabor College	B	Too small
Taylor University	B	70 Mil endowment
The King's College	No score	
Toccoa Falls College	C	
Trevecca Nazarene University	C	
Trinity Christian College	C-	
Trinity International University	B-	
Trinity Western University	n/a	Canada
Tyndale University College & Seminary	n/a	Canada
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor	C+	
University of Northwestern-St. Paul	C	
University of the Southwest	No score	

University of Valley Forge	No score	
Vanguard University	C	
Walla Walla University	B-	
Warner University	C	
Westmont College	B	Too small
Wheaton College	A	58 National / 450 Mil endowment
William Jessup University	C	
Williams Baptist University	No score	
Wisconsin Lutheran College	B	Too small
York College	B-	

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Q1: What is the organizational structure of your fundraising team? Would you be willing to share written materials about your design and structure including organizational charts, job descriptions, or other structural information?

Q2: From a theoretical point of view, how would you define successful fundraising?

Q3: From your experience, what are the most useful tool for fundraising? Are there examples of the tools used by your organization you would be willing to share?

Q4: Do you have a defined strategy for your organization's fundraising? If so, please explain. Do you have written strategy documents you would be willing to share?

Q5: What metrics do you use to measure? Individual performance? Team success?

Q6: What qualities make fundraisers effective? Individual qualities present in frontline fundraisers? Departmental qualities? Institutional qualities?

Q7: What relationship building or stewardship practices do you employ and how have they proven effective?

Q8: What advice would you give to other fundraising organizations to help them be more successful?

Q9: How do you foster teamwork and collaboration on your team?

Q10: How do you identify and cultivate potential donors?

Q11: Are there specific ways you communicate with prospective donors? Current donors? Is this broken down by donor levels?

Q12: What strategies do you find most useful in maintaining long-term relationships with donors?

Q13: Does your organization use any strategies for fundraising that would be considered innovative or "out of the box"?

Q14: Is there anything else you would like to share that helps explain the reason for your institution's successful fundraising