Alumni participation: An investigation using relationship marketing principles

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ALUMNI PARTICIPATION: AN INVESTIGATION USING
RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRINCIPLES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Alumni Participation: An Investigation Using Relationship Marketing Principles

by

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This study investigated in what ways alumni relations officers use relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters. Alumni programs and services at select high intensive research institutions of higher education were explored and an explanation was offered for how using relationship marketing in alumni relations might be beneficial. A literature synthesis, drawn from an extensive examination, evaluation, and interpretation of alumni relations and relationship marketing literature, helped to inform this exploratory study. Using a qualitative method of study, data was gathered through interviews with senior alumni relations officers, by observing their department’s web page, and by reviewing specified applicable documents. Themes, patterns, and categories emerged providing meaningful findings from this study.

The researcher found that relationship marketing principles were used by select alumni relations officers in higher education. These alumni relations officers designed programs and services that apply relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonds at the financial, social, and structural level to strengthen the relationship between alumni and alma maters, much like that seen in business literature. What differs from in business were the emotional and intellectual bonding levels found in the university setting.
Emotional bonds, as seen through strong passion and a sense of belonging alumni, also seem to elicit alumni wanting to give back to their alma mater. Intellectual bonds seem important to alumni, as well, when alumni engage in educational experiences with fellow alumni and with their alma maters.

Treating prospective students as valued customers before students first arrive on campus until their graduation and well beyond apply relationship marketing in a higher education setting. This application helps to strengthen ties that bind alumni to their alma maters. This study should assist the development of comprehensive and consistent alumni programs and services that encourage alumni to participate at the financial, social, structural, emotional, and intellectual bonding levels. Intended to provide alumni relations officers with a preliminary theoretical framework of relationship marketing, this study should benefit the growth and advancement of institutions of higher education.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions depend on myriad private giving streams to support both their mission and goals. One private giving area is support from alumni, a critical factor in institutional enhancement. Voluntary Support of Education (VSE) and National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) data show that enrollment at the nation’s colleges and universities have been increasing steeply; between 1994 and 2004, NCES reports that enrollment increased by 17 percent (CAE press release, 2008). Garnering the support of students, who eventually become alumni, and establishing a relationship between these graduates and the institution is paramount for sustaining this important private giving resource stream. Brittingham and Pezzullo’s (1990) research on donor motivation found that determining whether alumni are psychologically or emotionally connected to the organization-and the reason for the relationship-is critical to successful fund raising. Colleges and universities, and, specifically their alumni relations officers, attempt to create a relationship and connection with graduates who could be considered customers, to acquire necessary resources to advance the institution. This researcher believes that if personnel at institutions of higher education treat their students, who will become alumni, as retail store employees treat their best customers by building relationships and connections, partnerships will emerge that result in friend-raising and fund raising opportunities for the institution.

The focus of this exploratory study was to examine how an institution influences former students to participate in supporting growth and advancement of its alma mater and how a campus engages its alumni. This study examined how relationship marketing,
adapted from business and modeled in a buyer-seller bonding relationship, might apply in university alumni relations. This study sought to examine the ways in which relationship marketing was utilized by select institutions to encourage building relationships with alumni. The study explored if, how, and when these relationships were established, and what factors and experiences bonded alumni to their institutions.

**Theoretical Framework**

The roots of relationship marketing have been traced to the pre-industrial era; however the concepts and framework of current academic explorations of this theory are still in the early stages of development (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). According to Berry (2002), who formally introduced the term, relationship marketing involves “attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships” (p. 69). Gordon (1998) defined relationship marketing as an “ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers and then sharing the benefits from this over a lifetime of association” (p. 9). Relationship marketing is commonly applied in business settings where the intent is to establish relationships with the customers so they remain loyal and continue to purchase goods and services from the same supplier. The principles of relationship marketing are based on the assumption that marketer-customer interactions and strategies can earn and keep the loyalty of customers (Berry, 1995).

Within the context of institutions of higher education, this concept might benefit alumni associations, a unit usually found within the alumni relations office. Alumni relations officers encourage graduates to give back to the institution. According to Leslie and Ramey (1988), relationships built over time result in increased giving. They found
indicators for philanthropic decisions are institutional quality and prestige, and that when
relationships are fostered, successful fund raising through alumni participation can result.

Each academic semester brings new customers, specifically students, with whom
to build relationships in an effort to help secure their engagement later as alumni.
Characteristics and motivations for giving to one’s alma mater can be identified through
their student experiences. The most significant determinant of alumni giving levels is the
individual’s satisfaction with their undergraduate experience (Monks, 2003). In
relationship marketing, a satisfied customer results in a great return on investment:
satisfied students who are alumni give back to their alma maters because of the
experiences they had. In the language of business, the institution acts as the seller,
students as buyers, and the relationship is built on the quality of the exchange between
the two entities. The institution must provide an appropriate rationale to the
student/customer of the value of eventually donating to the alma mater. Therefore, the
purpose of alumni relations programs and services might be that alumni participation,
involvement, and interests evolve into philanthropic giving.

Some relationship development programs begin before students arrive on campus
in an effort to get them to identify with the institution, a process that will make the later
transition to alumni easier. In business this is achieved by early identification of the
wants and needs of customers. In order to retain these customers it is important to
understand the primary principle of relationship marketing, that it is less expensive to
maintain customers than to recruit new ones (Temporal & Trott, 2001). In the context of
higher education, this principle requires modification. It is not that it is less expensive to
keep a student who will become an alumnus, but that the transition between a student and
an alumnus should be seamless because the process of institutional identification by the student has already taken place. In business, customers have multiple choices of retailers. In higher education, students choose their college and when they become alumni they only have a single choice of alma mater. This study explored whether alumni programs with a top 10 ranking of alumni participation utilize bonding principles while building relationships between the institution and the alumni.

**Identification of Relationship Marketing Attributes**

Attributes of relationship marketing significant to this study include: principles, concepts, and bonding levels. Relationship marketing principles include: early customer acquisition, meeting the customer’s needs first, attending to alumni with one-to-one interactions, and providing services to retain customers. Relationship marketing concepts include: quality of service, value, commitment and loyalty, and trust. Relationship marketing bonding levels include: financial, social, and structural bonds. This study explored alumni programs and services at select institutions of higher education to determine if, and in what ways relationship marketing was used to strengthen the ties between alumni and alma maters.

**Problem Statement**

Higher education institutions are challenged to obtain revenue streams. Establishing strong relationships between the students and the university has the potential to produce these vital revenue streams. According to the Council for Aid to Education Voluntary Support of Education Survey (2007), alumni participation rates at high intensive research institutions range from zero to just over 46%, however, Alumni participation continues to decline, from 11.9 percent to 11.7 percent, a decline caused by a 4.1 percent increase in the number of alumni of record but
only a 1.9 percent increase in the number of alumni donors. Both VSE data and
data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) show that
enrollment at the nation’s colleges and universities have been increasing steeply.
NCES reports that enrollment increased by 17 percent between 1984 and 1994;
between 1994 and 2004, enrollment increased by 21 percent. NCES adds that the
number of younger students has been growing more rapidly than the number of
older students. These enrollment patterns, of course, affect the age characteristics
of college alumni. As enrollments increase, the age of the average alumnus
declines.

Ann E. Kaplan, director of the VSE survey, says younger individuals tend to give
less frequently, and they make smaller contributions. This demographic shift in
the composition of the alumni pool helps to explain the decline in participation. It
also explains why giving from alumni in dollar terms does not decline every year,
even when participation steadily drops. As alumni age, they have the capacity and
inclination to make more frequent and larger charitable contributions. The
challenge to colleges is to engage their young alumni early so that when they have
the capacity to make more substantial gifts, they will include their alma maters in
their philanthropic plans (CAE-VSE, 2007, p. 3).

Relationship marketing appears to work well in business. Sometimes there is
inherent difficulty in establishing strong relationships with alumni. Given the importance
of alumni giving, there is great benefit in understanding what ways relationship
marketing principles might be used to overcome this difficulty to engage graduates.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if, and in what ways, relationship
marketing was used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters. As
identified in the CAE-VSE Survey (2007), a sample from the top 10 ranking of alumni
participation at select institutions of higher education was studied. The CAE-VSE survey
provided a ranking system for alumni participation rates by funding and percentage. For
the purpose of this study, the participation rate percentage was used, reflecting the
percentage of engagement by graduates financially giving back to their alma maters
(CAE-VSE, 2007). The intent of the study was to explore alumni programs and services
at select high intensive private research institutions and to determine in what ways they use relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels. The study’s findings should be helpful in identifying whether colleges and universities use business principles to form lasting relationships with their alumni.

**Research Questions**

The research questions (RQ) were designed to explore whether relationship marketing was used in the context of alumni relations at select institutions. Three research questions guided the study: (RQ1) In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen the ties between alumni and alma maters; (RQ2) In what ways are relationship marketing concepts used in alumni programs to build relationships with alumni; and (RQ3) In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation.

**Overview of Method**

A qualitative research method was used to answer the research questions (Glesne, 2006). A pilot study of one public institution was conducted to test the interview questions (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). A purposeful sample of four research intensive, private, and non-profit institutions was drawn from the CAE-VSE Survey (2007), a national database. That survey provides a ranking system for alumni participation rates by funding and percentage. The alumni participation rate percentage was used to select the sample.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is that alumni are potential sources of funding for institutions of higher education so it is important to understand how the relationships
between universities and alumni are constructed. By identifying what ways relationship marketing principles apply to building relationships with alumni, alumni relations officers may be able to enhance friend-raising and fund raising, breaking new ground in institutional advancement. Based on the evidence that relationship marketing effectively works in business, perhaps it can also work in alumni relationship building. If relationship marketing principles can develop and strengthen ties with students as they become alumni, overtime alumni might be encouraged to give to their alma maters.

By determining whether alumni relations officers use some form of relationship marketing when building relationships with students and alumni, alumni relations officers can design a model for advancement purposes. By understanding relationship marketing principles, alumni relations officers can create programs and services to bond alumni to the institutions, which should result in enhanced revenue streams.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations as a result of the study design. Because it was an exploratory study, this study did not provide explanation or detailed descriptions for the use of relationship marketing. The theoretical framework of relationship marketing excluded other forms of marketing such as integrated marketing, athletic marketing, and customer relationship management, limiting the scope of the study. The qualitative research method used required the researcher to be dependent on the respondents answering the questions to the best of their ability without the researcher leading them to the theoretical framework. The institutions selected were private colleges and not representative of other types of institutions. In addition to these limitations, gaps in
literature applying relationship marketing principles to alumni relations might
demonstrate that this business framework is not applicable in higher education.

**Definition of Terms**

Following are the definition of terms used in this study:

**Advancement:** All activities and programs undertaken by an institution to develop understanding and support of all its constituencies in order to achieve its goals in securing resources such as students, faculty, and dollars (Buchanan, 2000; Rowland, 1986).

**Alumni Association:** A membership program for alumni that has as the major objective to get alumni to give funds, time, and other resources to their alma mater (Kotler & Andreason, 1987).

**Alumni participation rate:** The number of alumni donors divided by the number of alumni on record (CAE-VSE, 2007).

**Alumni relations officer:** The staff personnel responsible for implementing and developing strategic planning, policies and procedures, and special programming for securing alumni participation.

**Bonding:** Accomplished through creating connections and forming attachments, it is a relationship continuum where suppliers must think in terms of “advancing” this relationship to the next level rather than consider vaulting it all the way to the end of the spectrum (Sheth & Paravativar, 2000, p. 515). Increased bonding benefits relationships, accomplished by suppliers understanding where they stand with customers, where they want to be, and how they plan to get there (Sheth & Paravativar, 2000).

**Commitment:** A lasting desire to maintain a relationship (Proctor, 2000).

Loyalty: The seller’s perception of the consumer’s position attitude toward the product manifested by rebuying (Hougaard & Bjerre, 2002, p. 109).

Quality of service: A customers’ perception of how good the service is and the degree to which the service meets expectation (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005).

Relationship Marketing: Concerns attracting, maintaining, and in multi-service organizations, enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 1983). It is an ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers and then sharing the benefits from this over a lifetime of association (Gordon, 1998).

Trust: The confidence that one partner has in the other’s reliability and integrity (Proctor, 2000).

Value: A customer’s overall assessment of utility of a product based on perception of what is received and given (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990).

Voluntary Support of Education (VSE) Survey: The authoritative national source of information on private giving to higher education, consistently capturing about 85 percent of the total voluntary support to colleges and universities in the United States (CAE Website, 2009).

Overview

A theoretical framework of relationship marketing and its application in higher education, specifically in alumni relations, was outlined in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on the theoretical framework, institutional advancement, alumni
relations, alumni programs and services, and alumni participation. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology selected for this study and the rationale for choosing the research design. Chapters 4 presents multiple-site case studies and analyzes the data collected for each case study. Chapter 5 provides a cross-case synthesis, summarizes the findings, discusses the implications, makes conclusions, and provides specific recommendations for alumni relations officers and for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this research was to explore in what ways the principles of relationship marketing were used at select institutions to strengthen ties between alumni and their alma maters. This chapter provides an overview of the scholarly literature on institutional advancement, alumni relations, alumni programs, and alumni participation. The chapter also examines the academic literature on marketing and relationship marketing, which is the theoretical framework for this study. Also reviewed were important relationship marketing concepts critical for establishing relationships including quality of service, value, commitment and loyalty, and trust. Literature related to how relationships form through financial, social, and structural bonding levels is also discussed. The chapter concludes with examples of application of the theoretical framework in corporate America, higher education, and alumni relations. Gaps found in the literature were identified that support the need for this research.

Institutional Advancement

Rowland explained institutional advancement as “all activities and programs undertaken by an institution to develop understanding and support from all its constituencies in order to achieve its goals in securing such resources as student, faculty, and dollars” (as cited in Buchanan, 2000, p.7). Fittingly, higher education institutions depend on a variety of private funding sources to support their goals. Given the unprecedented competition for resources and quest for reputation, institutional advancement has become increasingly more important.
Fund raising has been a part of higher education in the United States since its earliest beginnings. In 1769, the College of New Jersey obtained contributions in produce from the country of Georgia (Pray, 1981). In 1839, the University of Vermont received deeded land in return for an annual income for the giver (Pray, 1981). During the 1930s and 1940s, alumni began to be viewed as potential donors in support of their universities (Rowland, 1986). In 1952, to help advance support for higher education, the Council for Financial Aid to Education, later to become the Council for Aid to Education, was established (CAE website, 2009). This was the first organization in the United States to regularly provide statistical analyses of private giving in higher education, which provided a better understanding of the field for advancement officers and researchers. It was not until the Greenbrier Conference, the most important event to impact the advancement profession, where giving to universities became an organized effort.

The Greenbrier Conference of 1958 called for support from all constituencies in education to understand the importance of fund raising (Worth, 2002). The report from that conference recommended that fund raising functions and activities performed in the academy should be directed and coordinated by a senior administrative officer who reports to the campus chief executive (Buchanan, 2000). It took nearly two decades following the Greenbrier Conference before the two of the largest professional organizations in the field of advancement merged their resources (Buchanan, 2000). In 1974, the American Alumni Council (AAC), founded in 1913, and the American College Public Relations of Association (ACPRA), established in 1917, joined to form the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) (Rowland, 1986). The merge united the advancement profession with educational purposes and goals of
colleges and universities (Rowland, 1986). It took CASE more than two decades to define its role with alumni relations, communications, and fund raising, as well as to produce a curriculum to reflecting these roles (CASE website, 2009). The reason over 20 years passed was because it was difficult for the membership to agree on responsibilities. It was not until “We Will,” a 16-item pledge adopted by the Joint Study Committee, was sent to members that a more focused purpose was established (CASE website, 2009).

Buchanan (2000) suggested “the definition of advancement may be changing and evolving into a new concept of marketing, a total organizational approach. He stressed it was everyone’s responsibility to advance the institution’s goals and objective” (p. 67). This responsibility included involving the alumni relations officers, along with advancement officers, in a new scope of marketing.

**Alumni Relations**

As part of institutional advancement, alumni relations personnel participate in the work of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, a voluntary association. As defined by CASE, the mission of the alumni relations office is to “advance and support educational institutions by providing knowledge, standards, advocacy, and training designed to strengthen the combined efforts of alumni relations, communications, fund raising, marketing, and allied professionals” (CASE website, 2009). Campus-based alumni relations officers are responsible for developing relationships with graduates and encouraging commitment to their alma maters. The alumni relations office provides diverse, quality programming and creates opportunities for alumni engagement in a lifetime of service to their alma maters (Worth, 2002).
Historically, alumni associations preceded the establishment of fund raising organizations on campuses (Pray, 1981). Alumni support for colleges and universities dates back to 1643 when Harvard alumni began returning to attend annual commencements to renew old acquaintances (Worth, 2002). Since Yale’s first reunion in 1792, a reunion remains a staple at many colleges and universities and is considered a cornerstone of alumni relations (Buchanan, 2000). Formal alumni associations and regular, systemic alumni fund raising did not begin until the 1800s (Buchanan, 2000).

The first example of recognized alumni associations began with the first recorded alumni association established at Williams College in 1821 (Rowland, 1986). During the late 1800s, more than 117 alumni organizations sponsored publications, reunions, and college clubs (Rowland, 1986). At that time, the alumni associations existed as an umbrella for all programs providing university support; as the universities grew so did their fund raising efforts (Pray, 1981).

During the 19th century, alumni became actively involved in gift-giving challenges between different classes and degree affiliations. In their infancy, alumni organizations provided graduates with opportunities to stay connected with one another and to stay in touch with their alma mater. The first alumni project was raising money to pay for alumni programs that helped alumni to stay in contact (Buchanan, 2000). Alumni were being selected for governing boards and asked to attend annual fundraisers. Universities began to realize the value of organized support by their alumni. Another 20 years had passed since CASE was formulated and it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the new profession in alumni relations began to function effectively with new responsibilities and accountability standards (CASE, 2005).
The alumni relations officers perform increasingly strategic and complex roles in serving the institutions and alumni (CASE website, 2009). These roles include championing the institution’s mission, encouraging and fostering alumni involvement, building long-term relationships with alumni and other constituencies, and collaborating with the advancement team to maximize efforts on behalf of the institution and its alumni (CASE website, 2009). This is accomplished when alumni relations professionals provide programs that respect, inform, and involve alumni:

Alumni relations professionals show respect for their alumni by acknowledging and embracing alumni as vital stakeholders in their institutions; serving as an advocate for alumni, representing their interests in working with institutional departments and constituencies as well as the broader community; providing alumni with relevant financial information concerning the work of the alumni association and its activities; ensuring personal information provided by alumni is handled in a professional and confidential manner at all times; and recognizing alumni contributions of time, talent and treasure (CASE website, 2009).

Alumni relations professionals inform alumni about alumni association missions, goals and programs; and they ensure that these are consistent with, and support the mission, goals, and programs of the institution:

Alumni relations professionals involve and encourage alumni to participate in and support the programs, services and events of the alumni association and the institution; encourage them to pursue leadership opportunities in the alumni association and throughout the institution; seek their ideas, input and feedback in any planning process that seeks to define or modify the alumni association mission or its system for selecting its leadership; and encourages them to serve in the broader community as ambassadors for their alma mater and for education in general (CASE website, 2009).

The future of alumni relations brings new issues: an emphasis on the ability to adapt to the changing environments, an understanding of the appropriate use of technology and electronic communications, and developing “an educated leadership to
help incoming students be supportive, life-long alumni who know how higher education works, how it is funded, and their lifelong role in it” (Buchanan, 2000, p. 223).

**Alumni Programs and Services**

To achieve the mission of alumni relations to engage alumni in a life-long relationship, alumni relations officers offer an assortment of programs and services. Rowland (1986) espoused that “alumni programs are the heart of the enterprise and are silent testimony to the goals and objectives of the institution” (p. 304). Many alumni relations programs were designed more than 50 years ago for generations with little in common with the majority of today’s alumni. During this time, typically one new alumni program was added every several years in an effort to connect alumni to their alma maters. Following World War I, alumni relations saw the addition of alumni magazines and alumni councils; annual fund campaigns were established around World War II (Buchanan, 2000). Since Yale’s first reunion, reunions are staples at many colleges; this stability is a cornerstone of alumni relations (Buchanan, 2000). Alumni continuing education programs began before the Vietnam era; alumni community service programs commenced in the 1980s (Buchanan, 2000). Brittingham (2000) explained “the mission of alumni relations is to involve as many alumni in the life of the institution as possible, requiring them to offer a wide range of services and programs” (p. 251).

In order to better serve and engage alumni, alumni relations officers turn to effective communication. Moore and McLaughlin (2007) conducted an assessment of an ongoing permission-based e-mail relationship building initiative for a large university association. How the recipients evaluated this initiative in terms of building relationships depended on age, gender, and level of involvement with the association. In a
counterintuitive finding, older alumni, especially females, evaluate e-mail communications more positively than younger females and older males (Moore & McLaughlin, 2007). This study demonstrates that communication must be customized to cultivate lasting relationships; therefore e-mail might only work for certain populations.

In 2006, Georgetown University vice president for advancement initiated an outreach program, Student Ambassadors, to reach out to alumni who had become disconnected from the university. By establishing a program to bridge the gap in communication, three recent graduates of Georgetown were hired and trained to interview alumni in person. The intent was to find broad trends in what alumni were thinking and to match alumni with particular interests to specific activities; this information allowed Georgetown to better meet alumni interest and concern (Masterson, 2008). Known as Discovery Initiative, this initiative was to combat the fact that less than three percent of its graduates ever had face-to-face contact with a development officer or an administrator (Masterson, 2008). This initiative lead by those in the outreach program resulted in a significant increase in donations to the university by those who actively participated in the initiative. Those involved in the outreach program remain active and details of its initiative are often presented at conferences to other universities (Masterson, 2008). Customizing communication and matching particular interests to specific activities, such as these innovative ideas and programs, help alumni relations officers accomplish their mission of improved alumni participation and philanthropic giving.

Currently, there is no standard model for alumni programs because institutions vary by culture, tradition, and philosophy (Buchanan, 2000). Carlson (2000) emphasized that, regardless of structure, alumni programs and services can play a pivotal role in
helping the institution meet its goals and objectives by nurturing relationships between alumni and their alma maters. Rosso and Tempel (2003) suggested institutions can successfully secure resources for their needs by “fulfilling the dreams and wishes of the donor” (p. 464). To do that, alumni relations officers must find out what alumni desire and how these desires can be met. Future alumni relations officers must continually invent the future by better serving and engaging alumni (Buchanan, 2000). As Grafton acknowledged, only then can alumni relations significantly increase the percentage that actively participate (as cited in Buchanan, 2000).

**Alumni Participation**

Alumni relations officers work to successfully create lifelong relationship between alumni and their alma maters. According to Leslie and Ramey (1988), relationships built over time result in donor giving. Leslie and Ramey quantitatively studied institutional characteristics to understand donor behavior. Identifying six donor groups, including alumni, this study tested the understanding of behavior between the donor group and the institution. They found alumni respond favorably in times of institutional need, whereas corporations gave when economic conditions were strong. While they found institutional quality and prestige as indicators for giving decisions, it was the strong relationship with the institution that influenced alumni participation.

In helping to satisfy the institution’s commitment to alumni, alumni relations officers also have a clear expectation of the return on investment, much like that in business. According to Monks (2003), characteristics and motivations for giving to one’s alma mater can be identified through alumni attributes and experiences. Using a quantitative method, a graduate’s financial profile and advanced degree attainment were
identified as variables to study. The most significant determinant of alumni giving levels is the individual’s satisfaction with the undergraduate experience. A satisfied customer results in a great return on investment. It is the intent of alumni relations that alumni participation, involvement, and interest translate into philanthropic giving. Todd (2000) expressed that “universities want to translate the positive feelings and loyalty of the institution into active advocacy and financial support for the institution” (p. 271).

Kopecek (1980) wrote about alumni as an untapped reservoir of support; alumni are potential sources of fiscal and community support, but to tap into this support requires that a college alumni affairs organization and its alumni help each other. In acquiring alumni support, Rosso and Tempel (2003) explained that “once asked appropriately, people give; they trust the institution to handle money properly, and the institution will be a stronger and capable partner; and they have confidence in the institution as a result of building a relationship with them” (p. 465).

Cunningham and Cochi-Ficano (2001) studied specific variables in relationship to donative revenue flow. In that study, academic reputation, scholastic aptitude of the student, and vocational choice were among the qualities that affected the charitable giving levels of alumni. These findings support a link between educational experience and giving levels of alumni. Administrators can not compromise on quality of the education delivered unless they wanted to put future giving opportunities at risk (Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano, 2001). If alumni perceive their education to be of high quality, their propensity to participate as donors will increase. Rosso and Tempel (2003) stated that new relationship-building tools should be used in ways that improve alumni relations officers’ ability to connect with donors. This is accomplished by having
strategies and tools in place that enhance relationship building, a relationship marketing concept.

CASE website (2009) explains how alumni relations professionals ensure the involvement of alumni with the institution by serving the needs and interests of the alumni, a key relationship marketing principle. Alumni relations officers can meet the needs of alumni by creating value, a business concept implicit in relationship marketing. In this case, alumni are considered customers value-laden programs and services help to engage the alumnus with his or her alma mater. Grafton (2000) feels that “it is possible that much of what we do in alumni relations today will not effectively engage alumni a decade from now; however there will inevitably be new ways to engage alumni in new programs and new services that we have not yet considered” (p. 217).

Marketing

The idea of marketing grew out of economics with an early bias toward distribution activities and efficiency of marketing channels (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). Traditional marketing focused on selling low-value products to high numbers of customers (Gordon, 1998). At first, businesses focused on the development and cultivation of longer-term profitable and mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and a defined customer group (Payne, Christopher, Clark, & Peck, 1995). At the beginning of the 20th century, product and manufacturing-oriented thinking dominated the business world and continued through the 1930’s (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). An example of a product-oriented thinking was incorporated in Henry Ford’s famous statement that his customers could order his mass-produced Model T in any color they wanted, as long as it was black (Njissen & Frambauch, 2001). After World War II, a
consumption-oriented society emerged and sales became a focal point (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). In the 1960s and 1970s as marketing theory prevailed, concentrating on price, product management, promotion, and placement companies continued to espouse seller-driven principles where the focus was on the manufacturer and the product (Gordon, 1998). This marketing approach was “too limiting to provide a usable framework for assessing and developing customer relationships” (Gordon, 1998, p. 47).

During this same time, a customer-needs-first principle began to take shape as relationship marketing thinking emerged. Influential writings of Adler and Arndt addressed symbiotic relationships and domesticated markets, respectively, in their market dealings (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000, p. 11). Adler observed that firm-to-firm relationships were not the traditional marketer-marketing relationship, but a cooperative existence between firms, known as symbiotic relationships. Arndt noted the tendency of firms to develop long-lasting relationships with key customers and suppliers, outweighing the focus on discrete exchanges and providing impetus to relationship marketing thinking (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). Marketing would be replaced by an alternative model where the focus is on customers and relationships, rather than markets and products.

**Relationship Marketing**

In its simplest terms, relationship marketing is the acquiring and retaining of profitable customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Gordon (1998) views relationship marketing as an ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers and then sharing the benefits over a lifetime association (p. 9). Gronroos (1995) views it as a continuum with transaction-oriented strategy at one end and relationship-oriented strategy at the other. To the broadest extent, relationship
marketing focuses on customers and relationships (Gordon, 1998). Gordon explains the value received over time is important, sometimes referred to as relationship life-cycle. Kotler and Andreasen (1987) identify the cultivation of connections on a continuous basis as a component of relationship marketing.

Berry (1983) defines relationship marketing as the process of “attracting, maintaining, and, in multi-service organizations, enhancing customer relationships” (p. 25). He views relationship marketing from the perspective of the customer as these relationships established are critical. Gronroos (2000) adds the element of termination of a relationship with customers and stakeholders, when the relationship is not profitable. For the purpose of this study, Berry’s definition of relationship marketing is used.

Knowledge of the historical perspective of its emergence is important for understanding relationship marketing. The term relationship marketing originated in service marketing literature, although others argue it originated in the industrial marketing literature (Berry, 1983; Payne, Christopher, Clark, & Peck, 1995). In the early 1980s, an alternative approach to marketing theory and practice began to take shape which emphasized customer satisfaction and retention.

During the late 1980s, organizations started pioneering a relationship marketing principle based on satisfying customer needs as critical for a company’s long-term success in the marketplace (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). During the 1980s and 1990s, within the context of higher education, relationship marketing also materialized (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). In the 1990s, it became clear that relationships exchanges were at the core of relationship marketing paradigm (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). Although the roots of relationship marketing have even been traced to the pre-industrial era, the
concepts and framework of current academic explorations of this theory are still in the early stages of development (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Today, there is no commonly accepted paradigm of relationship marketing (Hougaard & Bjerre, 2002); however, a variety of relationship marketing models have emerged over the years that may be useful in alumni relations.

Models

To better understand relationship marketing, as seen through the lens of different scholars, an overview of the models is necessary. Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh’s (1987) model consists of five general stages: (a) awareness; (b) exploration as seen through attraction, communication and bargaining, power and justice, norm development, and expectations development; (c) expansion; (d) commitment; and (e) dissolution. This model is valuable because it involves two-way marketing, incorporates relationship marketing network concepts, and considers the overall relationship-building process (Wang & Archer, 2000). This process should be used in alumnus-alma mater relationships. In this framework, business relationships evolve over time (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). For example, in both relationships, commitment is an “implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners and is the most common used variable in buyer-seller relationships” (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987, p. 19).

Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (1991) explain relationship marketing through the six-market model: (a) customer markets; (b) internal markets; (c) referral markets; (d) influence markets; (e) recruitment markets; (f) and supplier alliance markets. A market perspective influencing this framework addresses existing and prospective customers, customers who recommend suppliers to others, financial and power groups, the right
employees, and the organization itself (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). For alumni relations, this might be seen when addressing prospective students to encourage their enrollment, when speaking to alumni to influence them to become board members, and when asking faculty to speak with alumni and to persuade them to attend seminars and workshops.

Arndt and Skyte view relationship marketing through a political economy perspective and discuss the articulation of organizational behavior through the concept of domesticated markets (as cited in Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000). This structural perspective focuses on the organization building a relationship by helping the customer find a connection with the organization. The strategy suggests that “firms make conscious attempts to influence their environments through their exchange” to secure relationships with customers (p. 284). Leaders of institutions often attempt to build relationships with alumni by sharing its visions and goals hoping to influence donors to give to their cause.

Gummesson argues that “successful implementation of strategic marketing requires adopting a relationship paradigm between the company and its customers” (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001, p. 132). Businesses need to understand their customers to avoid one of the underlying arguments for building customer relationships. The belief that replacing lost customers is more costly and inefficient than working to keep current customers satisfied (Reichheld, 1993). As alumni relations officers work to keep alumni satisfied and connected, similar to business, retention over time should become less costly and more efficient than having them move in and out of the relationship cycle. By adopting a life-cycle perspective, the retailer knows where the customer is in the relationship with the company, how effectively the customer is being moved through the
process, and when the customer is falling out of the relationship (Newell, 1997). Just as a company learns to think like a customer, so should a university.

Relationship marketing principles of meeting the customer needs, providing good customer service, and working to satisfy and retain the customer requires favorable exchanges and interactions between the marketer and customer. This one-to-one marketing approach functions to bind the customer to the marketer, the alumni to the alma maters, for a lifetime.

**Relationship marketing principles.**

Principles of relationship marketing are essentially based on the assumptions that relationship, or one-to-one, marketing examines marketer-customer interactions. Strategies are used to earn and keep customers loyal by fostering a long-term relationship (Berry, 1995). Customer acquisition is the first step in the relationship building process, with the strength of the relationship influenced by quality of and satisfaction with interactions as the buyer-seller partnership evolves (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998). Relationship marketing targets an audience with services designed to retain customer interest (Reichheld, 1993). In higher education, alumni are the target audience. Alumni relations officers face challenges in providing appropriate programs and services designed to retain alumni. The officers must meet the needs of the alumni so they will choose to participate, thereby creating a strong relationship with the institution.

Gronroos (1990) speaks of relationship marketing from a customer-minded perspective and believes relationship marketing principles are customer-driven, not seller-driven. If alumni relations officers applied a customer-minded perspective when developing programs and services, they would be implementing this relationship
marketing principle. Understanding concepts critical for building relationships are quality of service, value, commitment and loyalty, and trust all vital to a personalized relationship marketing approach. Tracking and analyzing alumni preferences, activities, tastes, likes, dislikes, and complaints apply these relationship marketing concepts. This personalized marketing approach benefits alumni by addressing their needs.

**Relationship marketing concepts.**

The ability to strengthen ties between each alumnus and alma mater requires understanding the concepts important to building relationships. According to Proctor (2000), relationship marketing is about healthy relationships typified by concern, trust, commitment, and service (p. 272). For that reason, it is important to review scholarly work of similar concepts: quality of service, value, commitment and loyalty, and trust.

**Quality of service.**

When using relationship marketing, the importance of enhancing customer interaction and providing good quality of service arises (Berry, 1995). Berry (1983) stressed improving the performance of service personnel as a means of retaining customers. In alumni relations, trained staff that are helpful and attentive in meeting the needs of students, helps to retain customers after graduation. In the business model, Berry (1995) speaks of the importance of providing quality service in maintaining customer service and retention. In higher education, providing quality education and supporting students’ needs increases retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Proctor (2000) argues there must be an organization-wide commitment to providing high-quality service which is reliable, empathetic, and responsive. From an alumnus perspective, quality of service is the perception of the effort to secure participation at
university-wide functions by providing easy-access to goods and services, such as concert and athletic tickets, continuing education, and parking privileges.

Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos (2005) argue that in service settings, customer satisfaction is comparable to evaluation of service quality; it is determined by customers’ perception of how good the service is and the degree to which the service meets expectation. It can be assumed, therefore, that in alumni relations, alumni perception of how good the service may affect alumni satisfaction.

**Value.**

Another concept in relationship marketing is value. There are two kinds of values: one is cost per price explained in terms of return on investment, and the other is perceptions and beliefs. An example of the latter is that we value our families. For the purpose of this study, perceptions and beliefs are explored with value defined as a customer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perception of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990).

Voss, Cable, and Voss (2000) completed a study of nonprofit professional theatres that linked organizational values to relationships with external constituents, their audience. The study provides insight into the organizational values that form in cultural arts and explores how these values influence relational attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Important to this study is the influence the perception of value has on relational attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. By applying this study’s findings to understanding how institutional values influences attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes, alumni relations officers may be able to better meet the needs of the alumni.
The relationship marketing process develops out of value-laden relationships (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 1999). When alumni perceive and believe in partnerships and collaborations with their alma maters, value-laden relationships emerge. Voss and Voss studied the consistent patterns of organizational values and perceptions of values and whether they were congruent with external constituents’ values. In business, whether a customer is satisfied with the worth of the product or service helps to solidify the relationship (Voss & Voss, 1997). In alumni relations, value might relate to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that are derived from alumni participation in a multitude of alumni programs. Whether the alumni feel these programs match their perception of worth constitutes their perceived value of the programs.

Commitment and loyalty.

A third concept used to strengthen relationships is customer commitment and loyalty. As defined in this study commitment is a lasting desire to maintain a relationship (Proctor, 2000); and loyalty is the consumer’s attitude to the product manifested by rebuying (Hougaard & Bjerre, 2000, p.109). For the purpose of this study, commitment and loyalty are considered together. If the customer returns to buy more products, this commitment and loyalty will, in theory, benefits the retailer. In alumni relations, alumni returning to reunions year-after-year or participating in other university events, demonstrates commitment and loyalty.

According to Reichheld (1996), loyalty is about “earning people’s enthusiastic commitment to a relationship that will improve their lives over the long term” (p. 44). In business, one of the arguments for building customer loyalty is the belief that replacing lost customers is more costly than working to keep satisfied and committed customers.
Loyal customers are unlikely to take their business elsewhere. An alumni association has as one major objective, that of getting customers to commit funds, time, and other resources to the marketer, the university (Kotler & Andreason, 1987). A loyal alumnus is likely to remain with the alumni association and will give of his or her time, talent and treasure.

According to Sorce (2002), “marketing strategies that build customer commitment and loyalty are based on the marketer’s ability to communicate a unique message to the customers, based on the company’s knowledge of their interests” (p. 7). In a study of relationship loyalty, Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz (2002) tested a comprehensive model in a college alumni giving setting that integrated attitudinal, motivational, and psycho-graphical data from alumni and combined that with behavioral data to determine the impact of interactive relationships. They investigated the sequential or multi-staged nature of the relationship building process and how these stages impact relationship loyalty. The findings of the study suggest that “longitudinal communication strategies can be developed that help move prospects through the decision process, accommodating the long-term loyalty to the organization and/or social cause” (p. 24).

According to Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Cochran (2002), healthcare organizations depend on the physician and staff relationship with patients. In that study, the needs of families as they progress through the birthing process found that patient loyalty depends on quality of care and satisfaction received prior, during, and after their care. It was found that quality of care is primarily determined by social bonding activities, while loyalty is influenced by structural bonding activities. Therefore, how alumni are treated as students
prior, during, and after their time at college, in terms of commitment and loyalty, might determine the extent of their relationship with their alma maters.

**Trust.**

The final concept necessary to build relationships is trust. In business, trust refers to the confidence that one partner, the customer, has in the business’s reliability and integrity to deliver goods and services (Proctor, 2000). Trust relates to the belief that a customer has in an honest investment and engagement with the service provider (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Likewise, students rely on the university to do what it says it would do, to educate them and to help them graduate. If the university helps students graduate, this should establish trust and eventually result with involvement in alumni association activities upon graduation. Some institutions claim their students as alumni and treat them as such, building and fostering trusting relationships. By engaging students as alumni when they matriculate, the trust relationship has the opportunity to grow making a seamless transition after graduation.

After graduation, ways alumni relations officers try to build trust is by keeping in touch with alumni electronically. Lessons learned from studies regarding electronic commerce could benefit relationships building with alumni. Papdopoulou, Andreou, Kanellis, and Martokos (2001) demonstrate how trust and relationship building in an e-commerce world exist. Relationships are fulfilled by utilizing an electronic Servicescape. This electronic interaction demonstrates how virtual reality technology facilitates trust and provides benefits to customers. The digital age benefits these relationship marketing strategies by personalizing documents into database entries (i.e. name, address, demographics, purchase history) which allows the seller to meet the customer’s
individual product wants and needs (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). According to Papdopoulou, Andreou, Kanellis, and Martokos, “in e-commerce the physical-to-virtual transfer of commercial activity forces one to rethink the ways traditional rules of building trust and loyalty can apply” (p. 324). Not having a salesperson, or interpersonal face-to-face contact with the customer, is difficult to replace. This must be considered when using relationship building in an e-commerce world and especially important in alumni relations. An effective balance of personal contact and e-commerce communication is important to alumni.

**Relationship Marketing Bonding Levels**

A primary way to create a relationship and impact satisfaction and customer service is to establish rational bonds (Berry, 1995). Rational bonds used to develop loyalty have multiple levels, depending on the type of bonds used to foster customer loyalty (Berry, 1995). Berry identified bonds as financial, social, and structural. At the financial bonding level, the relationship is built on rewards, incentives, costs, and financial benefits. At the social bonding level, bonds are formed through ongoing personal interaction and communication. At the structural bonding level, bonds are based on empowerment, decision-making responsibilities, and collaboration among members of an organization. Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2008) argue that financial bonds are the weakest, followed by social bonds, and then structural bonds. Whether bonding levels are considered when building relationships between the seller, the institution, and the buyer, the alumni, was examined in this study.

According to Arantola (2002), connections with external constituents are better explained through consumer bonding. His study explored the impact of financial, social
and structural bonds on consumer loyalty, using a sample of hotel guests. The findings confirmed a strong positive relationship between structural bonds and loyalty. These results were in agreement with Berry’s (1995) argument that structural bonds represent the most effective way to secure customer loyalty. Peltier, Nill and Schibrowsky (2003) found in nurse-provider relationships, structural bonds had greatest impact on employee loyalty and satisfaction, followed by social and financial bonds. Whether alumni relations officers consider programs such as reunions and travel abroad programs that foster alumni loyalty was explored in this study.

Peltier, Pointer, and Schibrowsky (2006) also emphasize the importance of bonding levels in relationship marketing. That study investigated the shortage of nurses in the health care industry and studied the relationship between structural, social, and financial bonding, and their influence on perceived service quality, job satisfaction, and loyalty. The findings suggest that relationships develop through a three-stage bonding process: (a) financial bonds, (b) social bonds, and (c) structural bonds. Whether alumni relations officers design programs using these three stages was examined in this study.

**Financial bonds.**

In business, financial bonding refers to rewards, incentives, costs, and benefits. As financial incentives increase, customers are likely to perceive that the organization is committed to them, values their contribution, and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). Financial bonds rely on economic factors to gain customer loyalty and are often considered to be the weakest type of bonding activity, typically seen as very important at the beginning of a relationship (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2008). When applied to alumni relations, financial bonding
focuses on rewards resulting from programs such as annual funds and membership drives, benefits derived from priority point programs, T-shirts given when signing up for the alumni credit card, and privileges granted such as event tickets. This is only a partial list of possible financial bonds that are created between universities and alumni. This concept mirrors the belief that the level of financial resources that companies obtain from their relationship with different external constituents benefits the organization immensely (Voss & Voss, 1997). However, while financial bonds are the easiest to establish, they are also the hardest to sustain (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2008). In alumni relations, T-shirt give-away is an example of using financial bonds, and this gimmick alone does not sustain a relationship.

**Social bonds.**

In business, social bonding is developed through ongoing personal interactions and communications with customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Examples of these in business are store clerk addressing customers by name, knowing customers’ likes and dislikes, and communicating with customers in a meaningful way. When applied to alumni participation, social bonds involve communications and relationships between the alumni relations personnel and the alumni, with alumni classes, and relationships between and among other alumni. How well the alumni relations officer listens to what alumni say is important. This communication may be social or informational, and might display empathy, demonstrate good listening skills, provide supportive comments or create problem-resolving solutions. These are all examples of ways to build strong relationships through effective communication with alumni.
Structural bonds.

In business, structural bonding consists of empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration between members in the organization in which various stakeholder groups acknowledge and value the input of others for achieving the desired organizational goals (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) explain structural bonds as a “vector of forces that create impediments to the termination of a relationship” (p. 253). In business, empowered structural bonding activities take multiple forms including chain of command, corporate board make-up, and processes for new product development. Applied to alumni relations, programs are designed to commit alumni through involvement in event organizational committees; by engaging them in activities such as committee involvement, board member selection, and alumni recognition; and by asking for alumni input into program decisions. Bonds are hierarchical in nature. As alumni get involved with their alma maters, organizational chart-like bonds begin to surface. Creating bonds between the consumer [the alumnus] and the seller [the college] greatly benefits the university in moving its agenda forward and achieving its mission and goals of attaining excellence.

According to the Council for Aid to Education (2007), higher education participation by alumni has fallen to a level for concern. To overcome this concern, universities should better understand and apply the bonding levels of relationship marketing. Whether the three bonding levels should be considered when building relationships between institutions and alumni was explored in this study. In addition, the researcher also examined applications of relationship marketing in corporate America, in higher education, and specifically in alumni relations.
Application of Relationship Marketing in Corporate America

Research has been conducted on relationship marketing in business settings, both for profit and not for profit. Specific application of relationship marketing is seen in internet retailing, financial service firms, and for non-profit professional theatres. Wang and Archer (2000) examined relationship marketing within the context of the online retail marketing. That study identified three stages in relationship building and three marketing methods within these stages: (a) initial investigation–database marketing method is used by both consumers and marketers to acquire and convey information; (b) full range communication–plus interactive marketing method is used where market evaluation is the primary focus of full range interaction; and (c) relationship network creation–plus network marketing method is used when new relationships are evaluated with their efforts on the existing network (p. 383). Wang and Archer’s study demonstrated that a website that is well organized, easy to navigate and comprehensive helps build trust with the organization. Whether alumni relations officers use a webmaster to effectively communicate with alumni to build trust with the organization will be further examined.

Emmelhainz and Kavan (1999) studied the use of information in relationship marketing. This longitudinal case study of a leading financial services firm shows how information enhanced customer service, a key to successful relationship building. The study also demonstrated how social and structural bonds can be used to refocus a customer’s thinking from a cost perspective to a value perspective.

An example of the use of relationship marketing spilling over into the non-profit business sector is seen in the research of its application to projects in professional theatres (Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2000). Theatre values were related to managers’ beliefs.
concerning the external constituents that likely shared those values. These consistent patterns of association between organizational values and the clients serve their industry well. It is easy to find application in corporate world, but whether this applies in higher education was further explored.

**Application of Relationship Marketing in Higher Education**

Research focusing on model development and testing of relationship marketing constructs in higher education can be found in applications concerning student recruitment and retention. For example, using college student recruitment websites, Kittle and Ciba (2001) examined homepages of four-year colleges and universities using a five-level relationship marketing model proposed by Kolter and Armstrong (1996): (a) basic, (b) reactive, (c) accountable, (d) proactive, and (e) partnership. The content analysis focused on transactions and student recruitment strategies. The findings indicate that there are increasing amounts of interactivity and two-way communication by students being recruited to colleges. These findings may also be applicable when communicating with an alumnus to build relationship with his or her alma mater.

Using strategies for admissions recruiting and enrollment management, Gyure and Arnold (2001) designed a theoretical training outline with a set of attitude tools incorporating relationship marketing into their training methods. The purpose of the training model for new admissions recruiters serves as a cornerstone of a plan which seeks “to recruit not only freshman but alumni-to-be” (p. 36). The findings support recruitment as the first step of retention and require a special type of relationship building. These include personalized messages, services customized to student expectations, and rapid-response communication, all relationship marketing strategies
that help the admissions recruiters focus on the long-range impact of recruitment to the benefit of both, the institution and students preparing to matriculate. In alumni relations, whether early recruitment takes place before the student arrives on campus and whether alumni relations officers utilize any techniques outlined in this study was explored.

Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2008) also researched the application of the customer retention model on student retention by exploring the adaptation of the business relationship marketing framework and the challenges of college student retention. Their findings suggest the benefits of student retention when using a relationship marketing approach that includes establishing lifetime value, building trust, showing a commitment and loyalty, and creating bonds. Ackerman and Schibrowsky contend that the results of student retention are threefold: (a) reducing attrition is important for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education; (b) it is financially prudent to invest in retention; and (c) building strong relationships while students are in college has the potential to help convince graduates to become loyal alumni and donors (p. 328). Whether strong relations with students are built early during college was explored in this study. The authors also contend that “colleges and universities need to treat students as business treats their best customers” (p. 328). In business, “the goal is to find out what really matters to the customers, anticipating their needs, and finding ways to add value” (p. 329). Whether alumni relations also establish similar goals for alumni participation was examined in this study.

Relationship marketing must be reciprocal in that both the seller and the buyer benefit from efforts to develop and maintain the relationship (Newell, 1997). The goal of recruiting and retaining students is to help them graduate; a related goal is to help
students become productive and engaged as alumni so that they will give back. Whether alumni relations officers build relationships with alumni so that they ultimately support their alma maters was examined in this study.

**Application of Relationship Marketing in Alumni Relations**

Three research studies explored alumni relations that focus on relationship marketing constructs, program and service creation, and model development. Newell (1997) addressed the success of one college in developing an alumni giving program “designed to create pride among current students, develop a prelude to funding efforts, develop long-term commitment, and develop alumni networks as entrees to corporations by creating a marketing campaign, which showcased five alumni who had become leaders in the local community” (p. 4). It was not the marketing campaign that was of interest in this study, but demonstration of the importance of creating relationships through commitment, networking, and pride from successful alumni.

Pastorella (2003) postulated in his study of alumni development at community colleges that if colleges know how to cultivate and engage their alumni, they will be well on their way to establishing a healthy financial growth. Developing more extensive alumni programming and fund raising initiatives, this will help to build stronger relationships with alumni and cultivate their engagement. Laying out successful steps to build strong relationships help to cultivate alumni engagement and should include finding affluent and influential alumni, increasing the visibility of alumni on campus, developing a successful annual fund, achieving excellence, and having realistic expectations for alumni (Pastorella, 2003).
At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the “University of Wisconsin Model” articulates the multiple opportunities for connection with alumni through lifelong learning (Bedigian, 2006). This model embraces lifelong relationships and uses methods of delivery or interaction such as online, in person, in print, and on campus, as well as the touch points of potential interaction such as academics, interests, geography, affiliates, and life spans where needs of alumni would originate (p. 4). How selected alumni relations officers viewed their alumni programs and services, in terms of a model, were further explored during interviews.

**Gaps in Literature**

As previously stated, most literature supports relationship marketing as an emerging revenue-driven tool, specifically in the service industry of corporate America. According to Gordon (1998), education is viewed as a service industry. Institutions of higher education have been somewhat slow to embrace relationship marketing, and there are few examples of relationship marketing application to its customers, students who eventually become alumni.

Providing good service, creating value, demonstrating commitment and loyalty, and establishing trust are essential concepts of relationship marketing. Whether or not alumni relations officers responsible for delivering programs and service to their alumni apply these relationship marketing concepts has not been extensively studied, as seen in this review of literature. Bonding levels critical for establishing lifelong relationships between alumni and their alma maters might be better understood with a diagrammatical model explaining their importance to the relationship. Unfortunately to date a schematic of this relationship is not currently found in the literature.
Alumni not only just think about remaining connected with their old classmates through alumni programs, but they also look to their alma mater to help them achieve in the workforce and remain life-long learners. This relationship encourages alumni participation through institutional outreach. Alma maters building relationships with alumni have not been extensively studied, as seen in the review of literature. Exploring these gaps might help alumni relations officers embrace a new way of thinking and creating strategies to build lifetime relationships with their alumni, ultimately increasing participation and giving opportunities to their alma maters.

**Summary**

Relationship marketing principles apply when there are retail choices from which to select (Berry, 1983). While this does not apply to alumni relations because the choice is limited, what does apply is whether the customer [the alumnus] makes the choice to participate. In exploring the various ways relationship marketing is used to strengthen the ties between the alumni and the college, it is important to examine the financial, social, and structural bonding levels that influence alumni participation. This participation is also contingent upon service quality, value, commitment and loyalty, and trust. Alumni relations officers provide the proper products, through programs and services, which are valuable to alumni, and worth their commitment and loyalty.

Attracting new customers [alumni] is only an intermediate part of the marketing process for most service organizations [alma maters] (Berry, 1995). The concept that it is more rewarding to maintain a current customer base than to go out and attract new customers serves the idea of alumni participation as well. As in business, it may be less costly to increase alumni participation by encouraging alumni who already give to give
more, than to increase the number of alumni who do give. By embracing alumni, institutions of higher education can be strengthened and sustained (Buchanan, 2000). Investigating relationship marketing business models and applying it to alumni relations creates a greater partnership between alma maters and alumni. This partnership will lead to better alumni satisfaction and retention, and more friends and funding resources for universities.

Overview

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature for this study. Chapter 3 outlines the research method selected and the rationale for choosing the research design. Chapter 4 presents four multiple-site case studies and outlines the data collected. Chapter 5 compares all cases in a cross-case synthesis, summarizes the findings, discusses the implications, makes conclusions, and provides specific recommendations for alumni relations officers and for future research.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter specifies the research method used to conduct this study. The researcher employed a qualitative multiple-site case study research method (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998) at four private research universities. As components of each case study, the researcher interviewed each senior alumni relations officer, collected and reviewed various supporting documents, made general observations of the institution’s alumni relations website regarding alumni participation practices, and determined in what ways these alumni programs and services applied relationship marketing.

The researcher assured confidentiality for the universities and their alumni relations officers to guard them against being easily identified. This was accomplished by using fictitious names for the universities and individuals being interviewed.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine the ways in which relationship marketing was used to strengthen the ties between the alumni and their alma maters. Specifically, the study investigated relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels, and explored whether their applications influenced alumni participation. As identified in the previous chapter, research has been conducted on the application of relationship marketing in higher education, but limited research appears to apply this theoretical framework to alumni relations. This exploratory study examined select alumni relations programs and their use of relationship marketing. Marshall and Rossman (1999) discuss the use of exploratory study to help identify salient themes, patterns, or important
categories of meanings. Using multiple-site case study, the researcher interviewed four alumni relations officers to determine whether any relationship marketing themes, patterns, and categories emerged. Case study research is appropriate when the researcher seeks to: (a) define topics broadly and not narrowly; (b) cover contextual conditions and not just a phenomenon of the study; and (c) rely on multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). Delving into the “who,” “what,” “when,” “how,” and “why” about application of relationship marketing to alumni relations was accomplished with the multiple-site case study approach, an appropriate qualitative research method for this study.

Interviews were conducted, supporting documents were collected, and websites were reviewed, enabling the researcher to gain better insight into these alumni programs and services. Collecting information in this manner permitted triangulation of the data. Using multiple sources of evidence authenticates findings and identifies common themes within a study (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

Pilot Study

Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted to assist the researcher in practicing interview skills and gaining input about the case study protocol (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). The researcher chose a convenience sample university for the pilot study. The interview questions were posed to two people, a principle alumni relations officer and a subject matter expert at a public institution. While the pilot study institution did not match the criteria for the institutions being studied, the principle alumni relations officer and the subject matter expert gave critical perspective on the interview questions. It was determined for the pilot study that clarification within some interview questions was needed.
Multiple-site Case Study

When conducting the study, the researcher followed the case study protocol and asked each alumni relations officer the same interview questions, only inquiring for more detail when necessary for clarification (Yin, 2003; Cresswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). The researcher conducted the multiple-site case study with alumni relations officers regarding the use of relationship marketing in alumni relations at four private research institutions following Yin’s (2003) case study protocol, to be discussed in greater detail later. Yin (2003) suggests the unit of analysis must first be established before proceeding to the next step. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this study was determined to be principles of relationship marketing. Yin suggests that subunit analyses may also be identified and used. In this study, subunit analyses pertained to the relationships developed by implementing specific relationship marketing concepts and through established relationship marketing bonding levels. These bonding levels were identified by Berry (1995) and by Peltier, Pointer, and Schibrowsky (2006) as financial bonds, social bonds, and structural bonds.

The next step was to identify criterion for the selection of case study participants. The researcher used the Council for Aid to Education Data Miner (2007), a web-based benchmarking tool for education advancement professionals. Using this web-based tool, the universities studied were purposefully selected according to the following criteria:


2. Member of the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), Voluntary Support for Education (VSE) Survey participant (Council for Aid to Education, 2007).
3. 2007 CAE-VSE ranking of the high intensive private research institutions in the top 10 of their Alumni Participation Percentage Rate (Appendix A).

4. Willingness to participate by senior alumni relations officers at the selected universities, who have been employed by the institution in this position for at least three years (Brown, 2007).

By using the Council for Aid to Education Data Miner (2007), two of the possible 350 variables were selected, alumni giving and alumni participation. Organizations can evaluate and improve their fund raising effectiveness by examining the composition of gifts by average gift size [funding] and numbers of donors [percentage] (Kotler & Andreasen, 1987, p. 346). For the purpose of this study, the alumni participation rate percentage was used; the number of alumni donors divided by the number of alumni on record. The participation rate for the sample selected ranged from a low of approximately 30 percent to a high of just over 46 percent. According to Kotler and Andreasen (1987), the organization should be cognizant of the number of alumni donors as a percentage of the total number of alumni when analyzing institution fund raising results.

**Obtaining Access**

To obtain access to these institutions, the researcher worked with the athletic development officers at the institutions that had direct contact with the senior alumni relations officers who were potential participants for this study. The researcher obtained confidentiality from the athletic development officer before placing a phone call to each of the possible participants. The researcher discussed the purpose of the study, the time required of the participant, and how anonymity would be provided for the officer and the school. Once the four affirmative responses were received, those officers were e-mailed
an informed consent form and additional information about the study. These details included the researcher’s plan to collect documents and to prepare schedules of time allotment for interviews. In accordance with the UNLV Institutional Review Board, a verbal recording of their informed consent was obtained during the interview process.

**Instrumentation and Interview Protocol**

The researcher developed a case study protocol (Appendix B) that included the procedures for the case study, e-mailed a correspondence (Appendix C) outlining the study, filed the informed consent (Appendix D) obtained verbally, and collected supporting documents (Appendix E). For this study, the researcher developed the interview questions based on a literature review, the research questions, and the pilot study (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

The research questions (RQ) for this study explored: (RQ1) In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters; (RQ2) In what ways are relationship marketing concepts used in selected alumni programs to build relationships with alumni; and (RQ3) In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation.

For this study, the interview questions were designed using “who,” “what,” “when,” “how,” and “why” inquiries (Yin, 2003, Creswell, 2007, Glesne, 2006, and Merriam, 1998). This approach allowed the researcher to better understand whether, and in what ways, selected alumni program and services might apply relationship marketing principles, concepts and bonds at different levels: financial, social, and structural. An exploratory study was selected to examine the phenomenon by using a specific
theoretical framework to explore the unit/subunits of analyses through interviews to answer the research questions (Table 1).

Table 1  An Exploratory Study

| Phenomenon – Alumni Participation (IQ1) | (Leslie & Ramey, 1988)                        |
|                                         | (Monks, 2003)                                |
|                                         | (CAE-VSE, 2007)                              |
| Theoretical Framework – Relationship Marketing (IQ3, IQ24) | (Berry, 1983)                                 |
| Unit of Analysis:                       |                                               |
| ■ (RQ1) – Relationship Marketing Principles: |                                               |
| ■ Early customer acquisition (Peltier, Boyt & Westfall, 1998) |                                               |
| ■ Customer needs first (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001) |                                               |
| ■ One-to-one marketing (Berry, 1995) |                                               |
| ■ Services designed to retain customers (Reichheld, 1993) |                                               |
| (IQ4, IQ8, IQ23, and others)             |                                               |
| Subunits of Analyses:                   |                                               |
| ■ (RQ2) - Relationship Marketing Concepts: |                                               |
| ■ Quality of Service-judgment (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005) |                                               |
| ■ Value – product utility (Voss & Voss, 1997) |                                               |
| ■ Commitment and loyalty–rebuying (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990) |                                               |
| ■ Trust – reliability (Proctor, 2000) |                                               |
| (IQ10, IQ12, IQ13, and others)           |                                               |
| ■ (RQ3) – Relationship Marketing Bonding Levels: |                                               |
| ■ Financial – discount tickets, participant giveaways, specials (Berry, 1995) |                                               |
| ■ Social – homecoming events, chapter involvement, parties |                                               |
| ■ Structural – VIP seating, frequency program, committees |                                               |
| (IQ16, IQ17, IQ20, IQ22, and others)     |                                               |

Legend: (RQ) Research Questions  (IQ) Interview Questions

Interview question responses helped provide answers to the research questions by determining whether and in what ways relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bond levels were applied by these institutions (Table 2). Each interview was transcribed
and the data was coded according to relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels.

Table 2  Research Questions (RQ) and Interview Questions (IQ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IQ1</td>
<td>Let me start out by asking you, how would you define alumni participation *?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ2</td>
<td>Who is primarily responsible for providing programs for building relationships with your alumni?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ3</td>
<td>What philosophy, # if any, guides your thinking when establishing these programs and services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ4</td>
<td>What are the organizational principles ^ used to influence alumni to participate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ5</td>
<td>Tell me who is responsible for assessing the success of alumni participation on your campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ6</td>
<td>What tools are used to measure the success of your programs and services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ7</td>
<td>How might one evaluate the success of alumni participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ8</td>
<td>What factors * encourage the success of your alumni participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>In what ways are relationship marketing concepts are used in alumni programs to build relationships with alumni?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ9</td>
<td>What programs and services are implemented that best help to build and maintain these connections?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ10</td>
<td>What strategies + are important to building connections?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ11</td>
<td>What believe is responsible for establishing connections with their alma mater?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ12</td>
<td>When alumni do participate, what most influences + their participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ13</td>
<td>What might influence alumni participation in some programs and services, and not others +?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ14</td>
<td>How might participation by alumni benefit the university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ15</td>
<td>How might these programs and services meet your campus’s purpose?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ16</td>
<td>How might one create connections with alumni to influence their participation @?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ17</td>
<td>When alumni participate, what drives this connection @?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ18</td>
<td>In what ways does your alumni relations office connect with alumni?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ19</td>
<td>How might you know alumni want to be connected in this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ20</td>
<td>Why might alumni want to feel connected @?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ21</td>
<td>How might the alumni-alma mater connection benefit alumni?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ22</td>
<td>How do you move alumni from the first expression of interest to a higher level of participation @?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ23</td>
<td>When might it be best to initiate that first level of engagement with alumni^?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ24</td>
<td>Describe alumni connections in terms of model #. what it looks like, what parts it has?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding: *Phenomenon, #Theoretical Framework, ^Principles, +Concepts, and @Bonding Levels
The purpose of the study was to determine whether relationship marketing was used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters. This exploration was accomplished without predisposing the participants to the principles, concepts, and bonding levels associated with relationship marketing.

The interviewer’s closing comments included:

1. Please provide me any information you would like to add about your alumni participation programs and services that we may not have previously discussed.

2. After I have collected all my data and before I analyze the data, I will contact you again if I have any follow up questions only to clarify responses.

3. Once I have analyzed the data, I will contact you again, as a part of my member check, to make sure I have accurately reflected your responses.

The phone interview closed with this statement, “Thank you for your time and your contribution to this scholarly research,” as well as a request for any documents not available through their website.

**Data Sources and Collection**

The researcher conducted semi-structured formal phone interviews with the senior alumni relations officer, asking the same questions of each participant and adding questions for clarification as needed (Merriam, 2002). Each recorded interview averaged about 45 minutes and was transcribed at a later date. A participant check was requested of all interviewees to ensure accuracy of the transcription; however, two participants provided no response. Triangulation of the data for these two participants included only document and website review, along with the interview transcription.
The alumni relations officers were provided with a list of requested documents during the scheduled interview and were given two weeks to gather and send the researcher the documents not readily available on the website. Evidence of the levels of relationship building seen on their department’s home web page, in their promotional materials, in their alumni relations documents, and from interviews with alumni relations officers, was analyzed using document and content analyses. As found by Kittle and Ciba (2001), themes emerge using document and content analyses.

Documents gathered from each institution included:

1. Institutional definition of alumni participation.
2. Mission statement for the alumni relations office.
3. List of programs and services provided by the alumni relations office.
4. Measurement and/or evaluation tools used for alumni participation programs.
5. Institutional data regarding the number of alumni in 2007.
6. Institutional data regarding the number of alumni who participated in 2007.
7. Collateral material such as alumni magazines and brochures pertinent to the alumni relations office.

Each document served a specific purpose and provided supplementary evidence to the information collected during the interviews. For instance, gathering the definition of alumni participation determined whether the same, or similar, definition was used among alumni relations officers. The mission statement helped gain insight into how the alumni relations officers view the purpose of their organization, as well as how the alumni
organization supports the institution's mission. A list of the programs and services provided evidence of the structure and function of the alumni relations office. The tools used to evaluate the programs and services provided insight regarding whether alumni relations officers include relationship marketing jargon during their assessment process.

The miscellaneous documents collected, such as institutional data on alumni, alumni magazines and brochures, outlined the different terminology used to encourage alumni to participate. Prior to the interview, the alumni relations website for each university was reviewed to gather background information. By doing so, the researcher began to gain some understanding of the uniqueness of each campus. After the interview, the researcher viewed the alumni relations website again and made notes of information collected during the interview, and obtained from the documents.

**Data Analysis and Verification**

Yin (2003) recommends that prior to collecting data researchers determine an analytical strategy, as well as an analytical technique. This researcher elected to use the analytical strategy of developing a case description. The descriptor framework was based on the research questions guiding this study, as well as the interview questions. Data was extrapolated that profiled the participant, outlined the alumni programs and services, evaluated alumni participation, and determined whether relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels were used to influence alumni participation.

After deciding the general analytic strategy and methodology for structuring the study, the next step was to determine the analytical technique used. This researcher used document and content analyses, a framework that provides a structured approach to the qualitative data analysis process (Yin, 2003). Moreover, this framework was designed to
assist the researcher with qualitative data analysis in extrapolating detailed information and identifying themes.

The chief benefit of using computer programs is that they help alleviate the cutting, pasting and subsequent retrieval of the interview transcripts and documents (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). However, the traditional method of manually sorting to code the data was used, as well as Atlas.ti software. The coded data was sorted by using the content analysis framework, named by Richie and Spencer, comprising five stages: familiarization, identifying the thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation (as cited in Hurwitz, 2005). The five stages involve a systematic process of sifting, charting and sorting materials according to relevant issues and themes (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). These analytical stages rely on the creative and theoretical ability of the researcher to determine meaning, salience, and connections regarding the subject matter (Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

**Familiarization**

Within 1-week, the researcher listened to the interview tapes. The transcription analysis of all interviews was completed within 2-weeks. Two weeks after the call, the researcher re-examined the interview data and collected documents in order to better gain familiarity with each institution. The researcher also compiled lists of the materials collected. Once a visual scan of the interview transcripts and the documents were completed, the researcher re-examined each item and made marginal notes (Yin, 2003). During this process of familiarization, the researcher noted important issues and themes in the margins of these transcript notes and documents. The researcher also identified and underlined key phrases. On each of the transcriptions and documents, the researcher
noted common themes and important issues mentioned within a text (Yin, 2003). The researcher continued through the familiarization stage by also using the Atlas.ti software. As the researcher familiarized herself with the data collected, this process helped answer the research questions for this study.

\textbf{Identifying a Thematic Framework}

The second stage in the framework approach to data analysis was identifying a thematic framework (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The researcher organized interview questions using the research questions as guides. Using the thematic framework, the researcher identified the collected data to assist in analyzing the data and answering the research questions.

\textbf{Indexing}

Indexing was the third stage of this framework approach (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The value of indexing is to develop a system to categorize the study’s findings. During this stage, each interview transcription was reviewed, descriptive headings were selected, and emerging themes surrounding the thematic framework were recorded in the margins of the transcripts. Additionally, this indexing assisted the researcher to build a picture of the data as a whole to aid in the next step of this process.

\textbf{Charting}

The fourth stage in the framework approach to data analysis was charting (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The charting process helps determine the types of information needed for data analysis and the data to be analyzed, either thematically or by case-by-case. The researcher employed charting to analyze each case to better answer the research questions guiding this study. The Atlas.ti software assisted the charting
process by answering research questions in a more structured way. The researcher was able to extract data from the interview transcripts and enter the information into an appropriate chart designed around the research questions using a page referencing system from the Atlas.ti software.

Charting also enabled the researcher to compare and contrast the four cases. In charting, the first alumni relations officer (AR1) represents the participant from Academic University, the second alumni relations officer (AR2) was the participant from Baccalaureate University, the third alumni relations officer (AR3) was the participant from Collegiate University, and the fourth alumni relations officer (AR4) was the participant from Diploma University. Depending on the data collected, the researcher constructed multiple charts using Atlas.ti to assist in analyzing the data and answering the research questions.

**Mapping and Interpretation**

Mapping and interpretation was the fifth and final stage of the framework approach (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The researcher used mapping and interpretation process to further analyze the data and identify themes and issues. Mapping and interpretation data analysis was guided by the research questions and augmented by using the Atlas.ti software. This software focused mapping and interpretation of the data, specifically with the multiple-site case study cross-case synthesis, to find similarities and differences among the case studies.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined the research methods utilized to conduct this study. The researcher used Yin’s (2003) qualitative case study methodology which allows for rich,
thick descriptions. The researcher formulated interview questions based on the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, as well as the review of literature discussed in Chapter 2. The researcher conducted phone interviews with the participants using a semi-structured formal interview technique (Merriam, 2002). In addition, the researcher gathered a number of documents from the participants and made general inferences about the alumni programs and services. Following interviews, to code the data, the researcher used the traditional method of manually sorting and Atlas.ti software. The researcher analyzed the data according to a thematic framework, which involved indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation of the qualitative data collected from the case studies (Hurwitz, 2005). The multiple-site case study data was then compared using a cross-case synthesis.

**Overview**

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology selected for this study and the rationale for choosing the research design. Chapter 4 presents each multiple-site case study, outlines the data collected, and analyzed the data extrapolated. Chapter 5 provided a cross-case synthesis of the multiple-site case study, summarizes their findings, abridges the research, discusses the implications, draws conclusions, and provides specific recommendations for alumni relations officers and for future research.
The purpose of this study was to determine whether relationship marketing principles, as used in business to create stronger ties between customers and retailers, were also used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters at select institutions. This chapter restates the research questions explored and provides an overview of the scholarly literature on the relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonds examined. This chapter also outlines the data collection procedure for this qualitative method of research by applying document and content data analyses to answer the research questions (Glesne, 2006). The chapter concludes with the four multiple-site case study findings and summaries.

**Research Questions**

The research questions (RQ) were designed to explore relationship marketing principles and whether these principles were used in alumni relations. The research questions were: (RQ1) In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen ties between alumni and alma maters; (RQ2) In what ways are relationship marketing concepts used in selected alumni programs to build relationships with alumni; and (RQ3) In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation. The extent to which each university applied relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to alumni programs was explored.

**RQ1) Applying Relationship Marketing Principles**

Relationship marketing is based on a number of principles. It requires an understanding that the customer’s needs outweigh the retailer’s desires. This can be
accomplished by one-to-one marketing which allows the retailer to know each customer on an individual basis. Over time, retailer–customer exchanges and interactions take place. Eventually customer acquisition occurs, the first step in the relationship building process. According to Berry (1995), as the buyer-seller partnership evolves, services designed to satisfy and retain the customer’s interest are important to the relationship. Applying these principles helps bind the customer to the seller for a lifetime. This study explored whether these relationship marketing principles were also used in alumni relations to strengthen ties between alumni and their alma maters.

(RQ2) Identifying Relationship Marketing Concepts

The ability to strengthen ties between an alumnus and his or her alma mater requires an understanding of the concepts critical to building relationships. Relationship building, a key part of relationship marketing, is described by Varey (2002) as a ladder of consumer-buyer commitments. Several levels of commitment can be identified ranging from a prospect that has yet to establish a relationship to a strong advocate who is fully committed. In addition to commitment and loyalty, quality of service, value, and trust also influence relationship building and are important relationship marketing concepts in business environments. Relationship marketing is about healthy relationships which are typified by concern, trust, commitment and loyalty, and service (Proctor, 2000, p. 272).

Bedigian (2006) argues that touch points are critical for enhancing relationships in business and this is no different than what should be found in alumni relations. A touch point is an interaction with a potential customer: literally speaking to them with a phone call about a sale or greeting them when they walk through the door; using technology, such as an online purchase systems and websites; and using print ads, flyers, t-shirts with
logos, coupons and billboards. It is important to know if evidence exists that in building relationships with alumni, as seen through touch points, regarding these relationship marketing concepts: (a) quality of service; (b) value; (c) loyalty and commitment; and (d) trust. This study explored whether these relationship marketing concepts were also used in selected alumni programs to build relationships with alumni.

(RQ3) Utilizing Bonding Levels in Alumni Programs

Relationship marketing can be practiced on multiple levels depending on the type of bond(s) used to foster customer loyalty (Berry, 1995). At the financial level, the relationship is built on rewards, incentives, costs, and financial benefits. At the social level, bonds are formed as ongoing personal interaction and communication resulting from exchanges between and among people. At the structural level, bonds are based on empowerment, decision-making responsibilities, and collaboration among members of an organization. These bonding levels help to bind the customer to the marketer. This study explored whether relationship marketing bonding levels were also used in alumni programs encouraging alumni participation.

Multiple-site Case Study Data Collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured, recorded, formal phone interviews with the senior alumni relations officer at four private universities that were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) Carnegie classification of high intensive private/public research institutions (McCormick & Zhao, 2005); (b) member of the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), Voluntary Support for Education (VSE) Survey participant (CAE-VSE, 2007); (c) ranking of high intensive private research institutions in the top 10 of the alumni participation percentage rate (CAE-VSE, 2007; Appendix A);
and (d) senior alumni relations officers who have been in this position for at least three years (Brown, 2007). The researcher assured the confidentiality of the university and the alumni relations officer by using fictitious names for the individuals interviewed, as well as for the universities.

**Website Review, Phone Interview and Document Collection**

Data collection commenced once the senior alumni relations officer was contacted, informed of the purpose of the study, and he or she agreed to participate. The phone interview was preceded by a careful examination of the institution’s alumni relations website. The researcher interviewed the senior alumni relations officers, collected and reviewed supporting documents including alumni publications (Appendix E), made general observations from the website, and determined in what ways business relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels apply in alumni relations.

**Document and content analyses.**

As outlined in chapter three, the researcher used a descriptive framework (Yin, 2003) along with the research questions and interview questions to guide and analyze the data. In this study, the researcher explored in what ways relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels were applied in alumni programs. Document and content analyses were completed to extrapolate detailed information and identify themes that emerged from the data (Yin, 2003). The traditional method of cutting and pasting and Atlas.ti software were used to code the data. Chapter four provides the data analysis for each site, known by the fictitious names as Academic University (AU), Baccalaureate University (BU), Collegiate University (CU), and Diploma University (DU). The extent
to which each university applied relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to alumni programs was explored.

**Academic University**

Academic University, located adjacent to the center of a metropolitan area, was founded in the mid 1800s (AU brochure, 2010). The mission of Academic University is to offer consummate undergraduate education, to excel as a research university, and to ensure that its character is a common thread within its educational setting (AU website, January 18, 2010). This private, national research university, revered for its high academic standards for its undergraduate and graduate students, continually ranks among elite national universities, and offers a highly competitive admissions process.

More than 20 years after opening its doors, the alumni association was formed to serve a few hundred graduates. The association now serves more than 100,000 alumni while supporting the interests of the university (AU website, January 18, 2010). This university is implementing a software program to intent to engage its alumni through a new web presence and the online communications to its more than 300 clubs and their members. Chartered as a 501(c) (3) organization, which is commonly referred to as a charitable organization (IRS website, 2010), the alumni association is “non-dues paying” and students are admitted upon graduation (AU interview, March 7, 2010).

**Profile of participant.**

The profile of the senior alumni relations officer (AR1) at Academic University shows an executive, with a dual title in the alumni association and university relations, who has nearly 30 years of experience in the position. AR1 has earned a national reputation for innovation in programming for alumni, by offering the first interactive
continuing education seminar via satellite and initiating community service programs. AR1’s innovations have been used as models throughout American higher education (AU website, January 18, 2010). A graduate of Academic University, AR1 worked in the community at non-profit organizations. AR1 returned to AU holding several positions before assuming the current role of senior alumni relations officer in the mid 1980s (AU website, January 18, 2010).

Mission of alumni association.

Berry (1983) suggests that improving the performance of service personnel helps retain customers. Academic University has built a staff focused on meeting the needs of their alumni in order to retain them as members of the association. Under AR1’s leadership, over 25 staff members are trained to meet the needs of the alumni by implementing the association’s philosophy, “alumni do not interrupt our business, they are our business” (AU interview, March 7, 2010). Academic University alumni programs are each supported by an alumni board committee and encompass a broad spectrum: affinity groups, communication and marketing, academic and professional programs, web and technical assistance, and travel services (AU website, January 18, 2010).

Findings.

Explored in this case study were the ways in which Academic University applies relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to its alumni programs.

(RQ1) Documentary evidence of principles used to strengthen ties.

AR1 emphasized strengthening ties between alumni and Academic University alma mater, “We cultivate” and “we are the old friend builders.” These are examples of starting the process of customer acquisition, the first step in the relationship building
process. According to AR1, to the prospective student the first level of engagement comes in the form of a letter during the admission process, “The first letter they receive upon admission to Academic University is, from either me or the local club president.” The letter informs them, “If there are any questions between now and the next four weeks when they have to make a decision, please call us.”

AR1 noted, during the last two years when the market for employment has been down, “We put in a specialized program for alumni where they can get professionals to help them free of charge.” AR1 further noted, “Our overriding goal is participation”…“we believe participation will lead to a donor count.” Relationship marketing targets an audience with services designed to retain the customer’s interest. AR1 understands that providing services to alumni will help them stay employed, will encourage continued involvement by alumni, and will possibly help them become donors to Academic University.

Networking services meet the needs of the customer’s interest during a vulnerable time in the alumnus’ life-cycle of work. “We encourage alumni to use us and many do from a networking standpoint,” “Some ultimately obtain an occupation from this networking,” continued AR1, demonstrating that alumni benefit by networking with others. AU alumni relations meet the needs of their alumni during specific times in their life-cycle. Knowing where customers [alumni] are in the relationship with a company [alma mater] facilitates serving them better (Newell, 1997).

When creating programs that implement the relationship marketing principle of one-to-one marketing, AR1 explained how alumni programs and services are designed, “The parts (i.e. programs and services) are built to help us build relationships one person
at a time.” At local alumni clubs, this one-to-one strategy is taken to the next level when shared interest groups are drawn together by common causes. According to AR1, “Participation is actual involvement in programs and projects through the aspects of the local clubs” where people of like interests gather, an illustration of marketer-customer exchanges and interactions around a common good-the university. AR1 continued, “We’re true to our mission: To cultivate and encourage and emulate programs that reflect back on the university’s mission.” The by-laws of the AU Alumni Association (2009) allow “the board to recognize outstanding clubs.” It often does so because these clubs pride themselves in their common interest to give back to AU in time, talent, and treasure. A compelling statement made by AR1 supports the principle of using a one-to-one strategy to meet the needs of each alumnus and helps to affirm this relationship, “Students and alumni don’t interrupt our business, they are our business.”

(RQ2) Documentary evidence of concepts used to building relationships.

An important concept in relationship marketing includes products and services intended to solidify the value of the relationship (Voss & Voss, 1997). In relationship marketing it is important that the products and services offered are of sufficient value to strengthen the relationship. AR1 explained, “Alumni are proud of our graduation rates, proud of their education, proud of what the university stands for, proud of what for many, many years we’ve been doing [such as] raising money for scholarships for kids in their local communities.” AR1 proudly boasted about alumni programming, “The fact that we send out a university speaker to every club, every year, at our expense so that they get a state of the university message from us” is important to and valued by alumni (AU
alumni club minutes, 2009). Alumni, the same as customers, must value the product they receive, which, in turn, will strengthen the relationship.

The significance of customers’ judgment of goods and service quality integrates all resources, including relationships, and affects service system outcomes (Varey, 2002). Using the principle of relationship marketing where businesses offer services that customers’ value. AU’s alumni association also offers programs and services that their alumni value. Career service programs, sports weekends, and alumni vacation experiences for the whole family are programs greatly valued by alumni because of the quality of service they provide.

Reichheld (1996) defines loyalty as “earning people’s enthusiastic commitment to a relationship that will improve their lives over the long term” (p. 44). Strategies used to earn and keep customers’ loyal and committed to AU are seen in several ways from the womb, during the recruiting process, and after admission. AR1 explained that “25 percent of those admitted are legacy admissions; moms and dads have gone here.” AR1 also noted, “The bond for Academic University comes from the womb and some may say that’s a lot of pressure, others might say, that’s loyalty through and through.” During the recruitment process, loyalty begins to develop and relationships form between the student and the university that will provide beneficial in later years. Prospective students meet alumni when “high school committees are formed where alumni go out to the high school and speak about Academic University. The speech details how once at Academic University you are a lifelong member,” a principle of relationship marketing that demonstrates commitment and loyalty over time. AR1 further explained, “We don't wait until they graduate before we indoctrinate them in a positive way about what the alumni
association does.” AR1 additionally explained that when a student is accepted and “commits to the university, they are invited to a send-off party with their parents at the club in their area.” These clubs go all out to make the student feel welcomed before they even have arrived on campus, quickly establishing a strong sense of loyalty.

A variety of programs are provided to the student by the alumni association throughout the student’s time at Academic University. “The next 4-years we do three or four programs a year, especially at test time when we feed students pizza during finals week; we try to keep the alumni association in front of them at all times.” When the time comes to graduate, “you are automatically a member of the alumni association,” proudly stated by AR1. “We purposefully do not have a dues structure,” demonstrating loyalty and commitment to you as a valued member, from the first opportunity. AR1 was proud to wrap up the interview with a strong acknowledgement, “What we do is we back up what we say with what we do.” This type of service provided by AU’s alumni association is an example of the relationship marketing concept of building trust, demonstrating that the provider [AU] will deliver (Proctor, 2000).

**RQ3** Documentary evidence of how bonding encourages participation.

Relationship marketing can be practiced on multiple levels: financial, social, and structural bonding levels. AR1 spoke about a number of alumni programs and services that demonstrate financial bonds used to bind the alumni to alma mater such as the summer vacation program, sporting events, and student programs. Many alumni take advantage of AU’s summer vacation program for alumni and their families. Alumni are invited back to campus during the summer for a get-together. For a reasonable price, alumni come back for a week to reminisce and share stories with their families about
their time at Academic University. AR1 explained, “There are places where they can stay and eat reasonably on campus, they can go to the swimming pool, and they can use the boats that are free.” This is an example of Academic University using low cost incentives to bond alumni to the university. As more financial benefits are offered, individuals are likely to perceive that the organization cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Hunting, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). Financially bonding alumni, a strategy used by this alumni association, is using business bonding levels to build relationships.

Annual sports weekend is another event that provides alumni the opportunity to reconnect with campus friends for a weekend of exciting sports events (AU website, January 18, 2010). During the football season, “every home game is considered a homecoming game because of the nature of our ticket allocation which is a lottery system,” explained AR1. In order to be part of the lottery system, one must make a contribution to the university in order to get the chance to win a ticket for the football game. AR1 continued to explain that AU also “assigns those tickets to the local clubs so that they can raise money for bus trips and raffles for their local scholarship fund,” AR1 further explained, “They [alumni] would not get any consideration if they do not fill out the club report for the football tickets; it’s kind of blackmail, but in a positive way.” AR1 elaborated on the ticket services provided to alumni and students, “We open up a ticket window the morning of the game and we sell tickets only to alumni.” Students can get a maximum of four tickets from each of the leftover (alumni association) tickets, “an example of us looking out for students,” and an example of financially binding students at an early stage in their student experience. What AR1 did not discuss was that access to AU football tickets for alumni is tied to contributions in terms of priority points (AU
website, January 18, 2010). Priority points are an example of a reward and incentive for alumni in the form of financial bonds.

AR1 meets all new students at the beginning of their first semester on campus and invites them to “come over to the alumni office, pick up your gift, and say hello to us.” This gesture of rewards and incentives, in the form of a gift, is used to establish a social bond through the use of a financial bond. Academic University’s alumni association also focuses on starting early by funding student centered programs. The alumni association gives pizzas and soda to students at sporting events; provides them with care packages over Thanksgiving weekend; funds dormitory programs such as a five-mile run, canoe race, and boxing programs; and provides the campus newspaper in centralized locations. AR1 said, “We let them know about us early, sometimes in very subtle ways.” AR1 continued, “We have a daily newspaper that is placed in all the buildings on campus and in the dining halls, in a box that says ‘courtesy of the alumni association,’ a subliminal message: Every day they pick up the paper; they see the alumni association name there.” These are examples of financial benefits that students are provided early in their college career that might encourage social bonds.

AU provides additional programs and services to alumni encouraging social bonds. The alumni reunion, an event that brings back special memories while creating new ones, reconnects classmates (AU alumni newsletter, spring, 2009). AR1 expressed, “Connection is their [alumni] interest, connecting with friends over the years from Academic University.” The campus dorms are used for reunions and alumni can “expect the same spirit and traditions with some new twists,” explained AR1. This twist came in programming options, such as a seminar series featuring faculty and alumni discussing
relevant issues, and a session that explores career development (AU alumni newsletter, Spring, 2009). This type of reconnection stirs emotions among alumni, drawing them emotionally and intellectually to each other through the seminars, and forms bonds that do not factor in relationship marketing business literature.

In relationship marketing, social bonds also develop through ongoing personal interactions and communications with customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Alumni relations uses enhanced career services to support alumni by helping them to locate jobs, to manage their careers, to identify career advancement opportunities, to access educational seminars, and to network with fellow alumni (AU alumni newsletter, Spring, 2009). Communication through the alumni directory enables alumni to connect with former classmates. In addition, a program for women provides personal interaction opportunities for female graduates to foster relationships, to enhance professional development, to create a social network, and to connect them with other alumnae who have a “bond of shared, unique experiences” (Website, January 18, 2010). This shared experience is important in the higher education setting and is quite different than that found in business.

Structural bonds are formed when empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration are part of the relationship (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). When reviewing the Academic University alumni association website, the researcher learned of a survey that solicited alumni input. This survey was purposely constructed to gauge the effectiveness of the university’s engagement and communication with the university family. This metric was part of a broader strategy by AU “to seek input from alumni, more regularly in order to help guide the development of communications, volunteer and
engagement opportunities, and other university initiatives” (AU website, January 18, 2010). The alumni association is inviting alumni to become active participants in the shaping of alumni based programming and, in so doing, the university is including alumni in decision making in an effort to bond them to the association and the university.

Structural bonds were also evident as AR1 discussed alumni participation by individual classes, dormitories, and alumni clubs. “In the 1960’s we had freshman/sophomore/junior/senior dorms, you moved from one to the other, staying there for all four years and you built relationships with them.” Currently, the alumni association is trying to tap into that campus structural bond as it develops programming for alumni. “We are building on the fact that 80% or more of our students live on campus and often for all four years.” According to AR1, in the 1960s each class lived in their dorm and eventually moved up from one dorm to another. Freshmen bonded in freshmen halls, creating leadership groups and contributed to the governance structure of the dorm. They then moved up to sophomore halls as a group, strengthening their cohort. The alumni association plans to take advantage of these structural bonds by providing programming and services offered during reunions. While dorms provided social experiences, empowering each class with decision making and establishing officers for the class helped structurally bond these class members. Future reunions formed classes by cohort years and those selected as leaders in college continued to help create and design their reunion days upon graduation. However, there appears more to this “moving up” approach than just socially and structurally bonding students. Might there be an emotional attachment that develops leading to a greater commitment to their alma mater?
Structural bonds were also evident when discussing this university’s club format. “Our club program is the largest club structure in the world,” with over 300 clubs nationally and internationally. Although there is a separate 501(c)(3) status for these clubs, “we are part of the university and the club names are designed purposefully, Academic University Club of Chicago, Phoenix, etc., all inclusive, just distributed across the nation and internationally.” AR1 said, “You see, each class has its home page, each club has its own page and each dorm is developing its own webpage.” These are examples of empowerment, control over decisions, and collaborative efforts among groups with the greater interest of identifying with the larger campus entity. Involvement in these class structures, dorm identities, and area clubs provide opportunities for control over decisions within the alumni association, suggesting a bottom up organization.

AU offers an extensive alumni travel program with the emphasis on education that provides alumni opportunities to travel together on tour packages (AU alumni travel catalog, 2009). These travel programs appear to be ways to bond alumni intellectually and emotionally. During the trips abroad travelers partake in excursions to learn the historical significance and cultural differences that each city presents. In addition to the trips abroad, there are other times Academic University uses intellectual, or academic, exercises to attract and hold alumni’s interests. Lecturers and forums are presented on campus to discuss current events. AU also offers a service program during the summer for students to serve the needs of others in alumni club cities. Current students partner with alumni clubs across the country to serve the homeless and assist with Habitat for Humanity (AU service program, 2008). These service opportunities provide ways to bond
students and alumni to AU on an emotional level. Particular bonds seem unique to higher education, quite different from those found in business, and require further exploration.

**Summary.**

Academic University alumni relations officer opened the interview with examples of structural bonds created through Academic University’s alumni programs and services such as numerous regional and international alumni associations that control all of their programming including pre-admit gatherings and send-off parties. Throughout the interview, examples of relationship marketing principles, concepts and multiple bonding levels were evident. In closing, AR1 proudly spoke about some of the alumni staff, a full-time assistant for each program who oversees programs such as community service, continuing education, and career development. Meeting the needs of each alumnus, a key principle of relationship marketing, is accomplished by assigning staff members specific tasks to provide for the diverse alumni population. AR1 articulated in detail about providing “university-wide programming with coordination and collaboration, an important aspect for establishing connections with their alma mater.” AR1 explained how those responsible move alumni from their first level of interest to a higher level of participation by engaging their “talents, time, and treasures and moving them to become officers, then on to board members where everyone has a say, as an alumni, to run and vote, as all are stakeholders in the university.” The principles of relationship marketing which include early customer acquisition, understanding the customer’s needs over the retailer’s desires, and knowing each customer on an individual basis are often used by the alumni association at AU, to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma mater. There also appears to be a common theme that runs among alumni, an emotional and
intellectual interest, “to reminisce and share stories with their families,” “to bring back special memories,” and “to access educational seminars.” In alumni relations, these compelling interests tug at your heart and challenge your brain; however, these interests do not seem evident in the relationship marketing literature.

**Baccalaureate University**

Chartered in the mid 1700s, Baccalaureate University (BU) is located in the heart of the state adjacent to major urban centers. Driven by its mission, Baccalaureate University seeks to achieve at the highest levels in the creation and spread of knowledge. This private, national research university strives to be a leading research university and an undergraduate college nationally (BU website, August 13, 2010).

Baccalaureate University’s alumni association was founded in the early 1800s (BU website, January 18, 2010). Over the years, “class loyalties developed,” regional associations were formed, and traditions of returning to campus were established. A 1975 report issued by the trustees of the university states that “to a greater degree, perhaps than any other American university, Baccalaureate University has been sustained through the years by the loyalty of its alumni.” It further observes that “alumni have nourished Baccalaureate University, they have guided her, they have challenged her to be all that she ought to be” (BU trustee report, 1975). Another trustee committee report (2000) also highlighted this distinctive characteristic, “an unusually loyal and supportive alumni body, individuals with a disproportionate impact on the local, national, and global communities in which they live.” According to the alumni relations officer (AR2), “Each class is its own 501(c) (3), identified as non-profit, and under the university umbrella,” a
structural bond linking them to the parent university. Structural bonds impede the termination of a relationship (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000).

As a part of its anniversary celebration, the university installed a plaque in a central location on campus that acknowledges gratitude for its alumni, while reaffirming its commitment to foster alumni connections to the university and with each other (BU website, January 18, 2010). Using the fourth stage of Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh’s (1987) framework of the relationship marketing process, the plaque demonstrates BU’s commitment to its alumni on behalf of the university. As described in business when using relationship marketing, these are examples of ways BU earns and keeps alumni loyal and committed through the use of bonding levels.

**Profile of participant.**

The profile of the chief alumni officer (AR2) at Baccalaureate University has 8-years of experience in the position and oversight responsibilities with the alumni council. Continuity and proven ability played an important role in AR2’s appointment (BU press release, 2002). As stated in this press release, AR2’s focus on increasing and improving alumni education and outreach by developing a goal “to improve these programs and create new ones.” After graduating from Baccalaureate University, AR2 was involved with fundraising for the school by serving as an annual giving campaign volunteer and a class agent, examples of the structural bonding that AR2 engaged in prior to being selected to the current position.

**Mission of alumni association.**

Baccalaureate University’s alumni association was organized “to promote the interests of the college and a friendly intercourse of its graduates,” by “engaging them in
organizing alumni activities” (BU website, January 18, 2010). The joint statement (2002) by the trustee committee on alumni affairs and the executive committee of the alumni council stated the mission of the alumni council is “to provide services and programs that meet their [alumni] diverse needs and interests.” The alumni association actively organizes programs for socializing, networking, and community service, by creating a social bond among its many members for it’s over 160 regional associations, its 80,000 undergraduate and graduate alumni members, and other affinity groups. The association continues to thrive as it provides an array of programs and services, including events on campus and across the globe, travel programs, educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and social networking (BU website, 2010). The programs are focused on satisfying the customer’s [alumni’s] need, considered critical for the company’s long-term financial success (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). Each program “helps alumni engage with the university and with each other” and allows them to stay involved with BU (BU website, January 18, 2010).

Under AR2’s leadership, three staff members work to meet the needs of the alumni by adhering to the alumni association’s philosophy of staying in touch by going back, giving back, and experiencing opportunities through lifelong learning (BU welcome brochure, 2010; BU interview, February 24, 2010). The BU alumni association is a network of over 15,000 volunteers that allow AR’s staff to accomplish their goals (BU interview, February 24, 2010). This extension of the staff allows alumni volunteers to serve as “counselors, ambassadors, critics, and cheerleaders,” as they interview potential students, offer career advice, provide opportunities for community service, tirelessly express their opinions, and maintain the strong university culture of giving back.
and coming back (BU website, January 18, 2010). The use of volunteers, a form of structural bonding, is clearly a way of maintaining relationships with alumni by providing them some formal status. Volunteers are structurally bonded to the university by assisting, informing, and engaging other alumni with opportunities “to be of service to each other, to students and to the university” (BU website, January 18, 2010). While it is evident that structural bonds permeate this relationship, this bond alone does not speak to the emotional connection alumni have with each other and to their alma mater, with being part of “the best old place of all”. This emotional connection and desire to serve is not found in the relationship marketing literature, yet it seems extremely important in higher education.

Alumni of every age and interest come back to the campus for an alumni day to enjoy lectures, workshops, family fun, and lunch with their classmates while hearing world leaders share information. Many alumni get involved with the educational travel study program, “making Baccalaureate University a destination for lifelong learning” (BU welcome brochure, 2010) and allowing alumni to build connections through intellectual journeys (BU press release, 2005). These interests in community service through volunteerism and educational travel programs connect alumni and their alma maters, and differ significantly from the business literature on relationship marketing.

**Findings.**

Explored in this case study were the ways in which Baccalaureate University applies relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to its alumni programs.
(RQ1) Documentary evidence of principles used to strengthen ties.

Since the mid 2000s, the vice chairman of the BU alumni council committee has spearheaded efforts to find new ways “to meet the needs of alumni who haven't been able to connect” (BU alumni magazine, April 2, 2008). Realizing that alumni are far more heterogeneous than in past generations, AR2 saw the need for a greater reach as necessary. The voluntary leadership of the alumni association invited alumni to explore how to best solve this issue (BU alumni magazine, April 2, 2008).

Berry (1995) emphasizes the importance of one-to-one marketing, of designing programs to meet individual interests, as an essential step in relationship marketing. Alumni who had not participated in reunions were contacted individually and encouraged to attend future reunions, an application of the one-to-one relationship marketing strategy regularly used in business. In alumni relations, this one-to-one strategy is treated differently because in higher education alumni do not have the choice of retailers. A graduate of BU is solely an alumnus of this institution. BU seeks to connect all alumni, one alumnus at a time, whether disengaged or not. In business, replacing lost customers is more costly and inefficient than keeping current customers satisfied (Reichheld, 1993). Businesses typically let lost customers go, whereas alumni relations believes that connecting these to lost customers is as important as keeping current customers satisfied.

Baccalaureate University takes the first step in relationship building through early customer acquisition. AR2 confirmed this by saying: “our 150 regional clubs around the United States and across the pond throw newly admitted parties when feasible, when students get in [are accepted] to BU.” What was most surprising was AR2’s comment, “Some of them may not have even accepted yet, and they still get invited to the party!”
Then there are send-off parties before the student even gets to Baccalaureate University. According to AR2, “They have already met alumni within their community and bonded with them.” This early customer acquisition of students begins the relationship building process with the university.

AR2 further explained another important of relationship marketing principle used by BU, “You cannot pigeonhole your alumni into one aspect of alumni relations over another.” BU alumni association understands the need to customize services to satisfy and retain the customer’s interest. AR2 explained, “We do have such broad participation by alumni in our programs that we must offer a full range of services.” This is an example of meeting the diverse interests of alumni. AR2 further explained, “We have a diverse alumni base and we have to be careful because undergraduate and graduate alumni don't react in the same ways. There are different cohorts within the overall structure that you have to pay attention to.” These are examples of the need to be selective in programming to reflect the specific interests of each group.

Using a model to illustrate alumni participation, AR2 spoke of “a central circle with lots of spokes coming out of it as there are so many different ways that alumni connect back here.” As stated in a BU brochure (2010), alumni find Baccalaureate University “just as exciting, inspiring, and enriching after graduation, and the connection lasts a lifetime.” This supports the argument by Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987) that relationships evolve over time. And no doubt, these alumni know their customer complaints will be heard, “If we let any one of those spokes deteriorate, we would hear about it,” AR2 said in a commanding voice. This central circle demonstrates that alumni needs over time must constantly be reassessed to ensure that alumni remain connected.
(RQ2) Documentary evidence of concepts used to building relationships.

There are several relationship marketing concepts that are identified in business literature. This study explores four important concepts: quality of service, commitment and loyalty, value, and trust. Quality of service is typically linked to customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is determined by customers’ perception of how good the service is and the degree to which the service meets expectation (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005). AR2 acknowledged this important concept, “We look at success in terms of satisfaction and the relative experience [the alumni have] within the programs.” AR2 elaborated, “We have a reunion program that is very, very, very large but if they [alumni] are not happy with the experience … that actually is not a good measure of success.” Measuring satisfaction is a process that is not only quantity driven, but is also quality driven. How satisfied the alumnus is with the value of the program determines the degree to which service meets expectation.

Quality and satisfaction are not the only factors important in customer service. As AR2 explained, “it’s also engagement within a program” that is a significant part of measuring success. It is the interaction and engagement with their fellow alums and with their university that influence alumni satisfaction. The BU alumni association joint statement (2002), also confirmed that the measurement of alumni engagement success includes, but is not limited to, the degree to which “alumni derive satisfaction from services they receive or they provide.” This statement reinforces the importance of quality of service, an integral concept of relationship marketing.

Customer commitment and loyalty are based on the marketer’s ability to communicate a unique message (Sorce, 2002). As articulated in the BU alumni
association joint statement (2002), the alumni council pursues its mission by providing services and programs to alumni that enrich their lives and “encourage their lifelong engagement with the university, with its faculty and staff, and with their fellow alumni.” A number of strategies such as recognizing alumni history, frequently providing excellent programs, and mentoring services can be used to earn and keep alumni loyal. AR2 noted, “We have over a 250-year history of alumni wanting to connect, and from the very, very beginning, this concept of lifetime engagement with the university is just built into our culture.” AR2 also explained, “We invite alumni back almost every day and they are so much a part of our daily life and University.” Additional, AR2 asks alumni to mentor students and assist them with career placement opportunities. These strategies are similar to those used in business to keep customers loyal.

Value is a customer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product, based on what is perceived and what is given (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). The value of the relationship between alumni and alma mater is important. AR2 expressed, “They come back and see each other and reinforce their friendships.” AR2 continued that when alumni come back to the campus, there is “an expectation that services will be provided at the highest level.” In relationship marketing, when value is perceived, the buyer begins to formulate a trusting relationship with the seller (Voss & Voss, 1997).

The university shows alumni they are valued by providing recognition of those who giving at different donations levels, and serve on reunion committees, the alumni board, and as alumni day presenters. BU’s alumni association joint statement (2002) indicates measurement of alumni engagement success includes the degree to which “alumni recognize and appreciate the value the university places on its alumni.” This
appreciation builds confidence and trust between the alumni and the university. Building trust requires confidence that the customer has in business reliability and integrity to deliver goods and services (Proctor, 2000). “One of the first people who talk to students when they arrive on campus is the president of the alumni association,” explained AR2. “On the very first day on campus, as they gather together, the [alumni association] president talks to students about their lifetime commitment.” This builds trust with the students, the alumni association, and the institution. As a student begins to believe in the institution, he or she might surmise as AR2 explained, “I am here, I earned my place, I will be successful, and I will become an alumnus.” AR2 continued, “Alumni love Baccalaureate University because they remember how hard they worked to get here.” As a result of this effort, alumni value the institution and as an expression of that value, they remain connected to BU. This is the end product of the trust that students develop between themselves and BU.

(RQ3) Documentary evidence of how bonding encourages participation.

According to Sheth and Paravativar (2000) increased bonding benefits relationships and is accomplished by suppliers who understanding where they stand with the customer, where they want to be, and how they plan to get there. These bonds are identified as financial, social, and structural bonds. It is apparent that BU understands where they are with their alumni as they provide a number of programs and services designed to bond alumni with their alma mater. BU offers multiple programs that engage faculty with alumni, either through an alumni day where alumni attend lectures and on-campus symposiums, or through online services where they access career placement, and continuing education courses. “We are constantly trying to find ways to link our alumni
back with faculty across disciplines,” according to AR2. These programs create opportunities to build relationships with each other and with the university by using their Baccalaureate University ties.

Monetary benefits were mentioned only in the context of the rich history of alumni giving to BU. AR2 questioned what was the driving force for alumni participation, the giving or the engagement, “Is it the chicken or the egg?” “Our annual giving is so high from a development perspective, as we have the highest annual giving program.” Because of their high giving levels, it is not the practice of this alumni association to use monetary inducements to develop connections with its members. Financial bonds appeared less important at BU, as indicated during the interview of AR2.

Baccalaureate University’s opportunities to connect appear to be created by using social and structural bonds. AR2 cited examples of alumni programs and services that strengthen these bonds. AR2’s observation that “we find a way to strengthen the bonds between an alumnus and our institution, and create a bond that let alumni go out into the world and present our institution in a favorable light for other alumni and with prospective students.” AR2 suggested two types of relationships, “one, is alumni with other alumni; the other is alumni with the university.” These relationships create two bonding levels, social, described by AR2 when “alumni interact with each other”; and structural, when “alumni act on behalf of the institution in a formal matter.”

When developing social bonding levels, various ongoing personal interactions and communications are used with customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). BU’s alumni magazine is published monthly to a circulation of more than 50,000 (BU alumni magazine, 2010). This magazine keeps alumni connected, and creates a continued sense
of belonging (Alumni magazine, 2010). A quarterly insert into the alumni magazine features unsung alumni heroes who have gone above and beyond in volunteer efforts. It also identifies special service projects of alumni groups, inviting interested alumni to use those ties to be of service to others, an interesting form of social bonding.

There are several other examples of social bonding opportunities available to BU alumni: the educational travel program, alumni panel dialogs and discussions, and social networking (BU website, January 18, 2010). Social bonds, a level that provides more secure relationships than do financial bonds can also provide intellectual growth as seen in educational travel programs. In retail, travel agencies give good deals for trips abroad to entice one to buy. In higher education, travel abroad programs charge a premium assuming one will pay more to go with fellow alumni. This willingness of alumni to pay more to travel with their fellows who have this common tie to BU is different than that found in business relationship marketing and requires further exploration.

The alumni reunion structure is a very unique model. According to AR2, “It [reunion structure] is a part of the centerpiece of what we do.” Hundreds and hundreds of students stay after the end of the school year to help support this phenomenon. The reunion is held on the same weekend every year with alumni invited back every year and every class represented, attracting over 20,000 people per year.” The reunion was created to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones, and “sample intellectual fare” (BU website, August 13, 2010). This idea of bonding alumni on an emotional and intellectual level permeates BU’s core philosophy of engagement.

AR2 explained that the first year after graduation “a huge number of them [alumni] come back for reunions, like 65 percent to 70 percent come back!” AR2 further
elaborated, “This event includes alumni and their families for three days of programming which means not just dinners and parties, but it’s also forums, faculty and alumni panels, half-day conferences, and department open houses.” AR2 explained, “The basic strategies are to give them a chance to socialize, give them a chance to interact with faculty and academic programming of the institution, provide some career services for those who are looking for networking opportunities, and provide community service opportunities whenever we can.” Each event supports Arndt and Skyte’s position that organizations build a relationship by helping the customer find a connection with the organization (as cited in Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000).

As AR2 noted about their reunions, even social bonding in cyberspace is available “for those who cannot come back in person: we provide some kind of online component to make them get a sense of what happened.” Creating this social connection, although from afar, alumni remain attached to their alma mater. The digital age benefits these relationship marketing strategies by personalizing the experience for those unable to attend. This strategy allows the seller [BU] to meet the customer’s [alumnus’s] individual product wants and needs (as cited in Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000).

Many of BU’s programs and services are also designed as a vector of force that creates impediments to the termination of a relationship (Sheth & Paravatiyar, 2000). In relationship marketing, structural bonds represent the most effective way to secure customer loyalty (Berry, 1995). Alumni who act on behalf of BU would likely be those who have already developed very strong ties to the institution. AR2 explained, “We are structured from an undergraduate standpoint and we are organized around very strong class ties with each undergraduate alumnus identifying from day one with their cohort,
the class with which they start.” AR2 explained that one must be careful of watching the “depth and breadth of alumni engagement since how deep the contact is, and how long-lasting, is important to the alumni.”

Empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration are the foundation for the success of these alumni programs; they are also the components of structural bonds. AR2 explained, “Every class runs their own reunion and it's very heavily volunteer-driven, and, therefore when our alumni think about it, most of the programming we do, they think of first with their class officers, as the focus is on the volunteers, not on the staff.” AR2 further elaborated that “they are responsible for much of their programming, even when we're there in a support position we make sure that the volunteers make the important decisions, take ownership of the event, and get credit for that work. They feel empowered!” AR2 also noted, “Of the over 80,000 alumni, at any one time there are 15,000 alumni volunteers who actively participate and give their time.” Such empowerment was also articulated in the BU joint statement (2002), which described how the alumni council pursues its mission by providing “opportunities for alumni to serve in leadership roles in their classes, regional associations, affinity groups, on the executive committee and other committees,” examples of creating structural bonds.

Structural bond develop through empowerment between members in an organization in which stakeholder groups acknowledge and value the input of others for achieving desired goals (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2000). Because structural bonds are recognized as the strongest, most meaningful level of customer to supplier linkage, it is likely that at BU, the involvement of alumni in the planning and execution of the alumni reunions has strengthened the ties between alumni and the institution.
Some alumni programs, such as a prospective student review, began as social bonding and moved to the structural bonding level. This review program offers the opportunity for prospective Baccalaureate University students to be interviewed by an alum. Personal interactions and communications with over 7,000 alumni take place through these student interviews. The prospective student review gives each student the opportunity to connect with an alum to discover the culture of BU, which can be a key recruiting tool. This review also provides the alum opportunity to collaborate with the prospective students, structural bonding the alum to the alma mater.

These same alumni are also called upon to mentor students, to help graduates find jobs, and to endow faculty research positions. This extraordinary volunteerism is part of the culture of Baccalaureate University. Creatively engaging volunteers creates more “emissaries” for the university, explained AR2. The activity of volunteerism creates a significant bond between alumni and its alma mater, but that bond is different than that found when creating social bonds in business. BU culture that penetrates the fabric of the alumni seems more of an emotional attachment, beyond purely social or structural, and is an example of how BU involves or invites alumni to be part of the bonding process.

AR2 further explained the importance of relationship marketing bonds, “There are some alumni who are really interested in the social side of the engagement, others are interested in the academic enrichment.” For the socially inclined many activities such as tailgates and homecoming are available. For alumni interested in academic, BU provides these alumni with educational programs as a way to connect those who otherwise might not engage in university social activities. According to AR2, “The driving force for them is hearing faculty interacting with faculty, finding out about research, since we are a great
research institution.” BU is practicing what Berry is preaching, although academic enrichment does not appear in the relationship marketing literature as a bonding level.

Alumni day is another example of a program that touches upon many different bonding levels. Alumni day draws over 1000 alumni to campus (BU website, January 18, 2010), engaging alumni socially, emotionally, intellectually, and structurally. Alumni involve themselves with each other socially in planning and hosting the event as they participate in decision making for the event, a structural bond activity (Peltier, Pointer, Schibrowsky, 2006). Alumni involve themselves by attending lectures and forums during the event and connect with other like-minded graduates to enjoy the experience, suggesting unidentified bonds involving intellectual growth.

**Summary.**

Baccalaureate University’s alumni relations officer used the analogy of a three legged stool when describing alumni connection, “The faculty, the student, and the alumni are all responsible” for this connection. Each of these entities articulates with each other helping “alumni to connect socially, to connect through their class, to connect through community service, and to connect through their regional associations or clubs in their area.” These class connections and regional associations consist of empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration between members in the organization to achieve their desired goals. The sense of empowerment structurally binds the alumni to their alma maters. Peltier, Pointer, and Schibrowsky (2000) argue that strong associations result from structural bonds being formulated between the customer and the retailer when customers are empowered with decision making. Alumni clubs give alumni power over
deciding about special programming, setting up parties for prospective students, and designing faculty lecture series for their shared interest group.

It is the vast network of over 15,000 volunteers involved in community service projects, enjoying faculty lectures, and participating in the educational travel study program that appears to be an anomaly to the business world’s application of relationship marketing principles. Emotional and intellectual bonds that are formed when alumni engage in such programs and services are quite powerful and need further explanation.

**Collegiate University**

Collegiate University (CU), located on the East Coast within close proximity to a large metropolitan area, is one of the earlier colleges founded in America. The mission of CU is to offer the best education possible and allow students to design their own educational paths (CU Website, January 18, 2010). CU provides excellent undergraduate, graduate, and medical education, and intends to achieve new levels of excellence in research, education, and public leadership (CU academic plan, 2004).

Collegiate University alumni association is organized in such way that “all alumni are automatically life members of the association,” which seeks to unite alumni efforts in support of the university by “nurturing each alumna and alumnus relationship” (CU alumni presidential letter, January 2010). As articulated in an alumni association letter (2010), the alumni association president recently set ambitious priorities for the association using business relationship marketing principles, including: (a) effectively driving young alumni engagement, an early customer acquisition strategy; (b) recruiting emerging alumni leaders to the board, structurally binding alumni and empowering them
with decision-making; and (c) enhancing the association careers program and services, meeting the needs of the individual.

Chartered as a 501(c) (3) organization, the alumni association selects its officers and board members every 2-years though an election process. Most board members distinguish themselves as leaders within the volunteer programs or alumni communities bringing specialized expertise required for current projects and priorities (CU website, January 18, 2010). This purposefully designed structural bond strengthens commitment and represents the most effective way to secure customer loyalty (Berry, 1995).

Profile of participant.

The chief alumni officer (AR3) at Collegiate University is someone who graduated from CU and has almost 5-years of experience in the position. This individual works closely with an over 75,000-member alumni association to continue the university experience beyond graduation by engaging alumni with the university and the worldwide alumni community (CU press release, November, 28, 2005). Under AR3’s leadership, 30 staff members work to meet the needs of alumni by adhering to the alumni association’s guiding principle of motivating alumni to engage with the university by advancing lifelong connections (CU website, January 18, 2010; CU interview, February 26, 2010).

Mission of the alumni association.

The mission of the alumni association is to keep its alumni engaged with the university and with each other, as well as to help communicate the university’s agenda and aspirations to fellow alumni (CU press release, November 28, 2005). To accomplish this mission, programs and services are tailored to provide alumni with opportunities to continue learning, to maintain contacts with fellow alumni at reunions, and to remain
involved with the university through volunteer roles (CU press release, November 28, 2005). Aligning alumni programs with the interests of the alumni is a key example of putting the interests of alumni first.

“Focusing on our youngest alumni and helping alumni maintaining lifelong connection to the university” are two CU alumni association goals (CU alumni presidential letter, January 2010). Fulfilling these goals helps to ensure that alumni remain engaged with the university. Key relationship marketing principles also focus on early customer acquisition and develop strategies to maintain this connection for a prolonged period of time (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998).

Findings.

Explored in this case study were the ways in which Collegiate University applies relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to its alumni programs.

(RQ1) Documentary evidence of principles used to strengthen ties.

Customer acquisition is the first step in the relationship building process in which relationship marketing principles are used to secure customers, (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998). AR3 agreed, “We feel it is important to engage alumni as soon as they apply to the university and continue to engage them while they are students and young alumni” (CU interview, February 26, 2010). AR3 continued, “We start to educate the student about what it is to be an alumnus while they are still students, not something we've historically done here and we're trying to do it more.” This change in strategy supports the importance of early acquisition as the first step in the relationship building process.

Customer acquisition also requires presenting a great sales pitch. According to AR3, “There are alumni who sit on the fence and they are known as ‘persuadable
alumni,’ their interest can go either way, depending on their needs; we try to contact them [alumni] and provide opportunities for them to get in touch with the university and to make a positive connection to the university.” Furthermore, AR3 explained that often time alumni do not necessarily know that they want to participate, “You just contact as many alumni as you know and hope you provide the opportunity for them to be positively engaged.” This approach supports the first two stages of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh’s (1987) framework of the retail marketing process of awareness and exploration as seen through attraction, communication, and bargaining. However, presenting opportunities by throwing them out there and seeing if they attract participants, seems to be a strategy that contradicts the argument often practiced in business that one-to-one interaction with customers lead to improved lifetime value (Gordon, 1998).

Customer acquisition is a process and involves, as AR3 points out, “trying to get alumni to attend a [university] event, whether it’s in their local community, or whether it is back here on campus.” AR3 continued, “You then have the opportunity to get them to go to more things and then hopefully their level of interest and participation will become greater.” AR3 further explained, “You do that when they’re young alumni, less than 10 years out, with engagement programs tailored specifically to young alumni, so that by the time they're 10 years out you've already got them hooked.” These examples of designing programs that satisfy alumni by reflecting their interests support Arndt and Skyte’s argument that organizations build a relationship by helping the customer find a connection with the organization (as cited in Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). AR3 said, “One of the most difficult things in the world is to go to somebody who’s 20 years out and really hasn't done anything yet, to try to get them to become kind of active volunteer you
are looking for.” No buyer-seller partnership has evolved because of the disconnection in the relationship with alumni. Putting the needs of the customer first helps develop the buyer-seller partnership. AR3 articulated, “Its best in terms of events, by offering sophisticated customer-focused events.” AR3 continued, “We need to meet their expectations, so what we try to do is focus on the customer, a very customer focused view of our alumni.” Using Gronroos (1990) and his customer-minded perspective, AR3 had no qualms about identifying CU alumni as customers.

AR3 viewed the CU alumni association as the henhouse, “You need a very good henhouse for eggs to get laid and positive alumni engagement is the henhouse as it creates the best possible incubator.” Through participation and involvement of alumni in customer-focused programs, a positive marketer-customer interaction develops. As these interactions and exchanges develop, it is the strength of the relationship influenced by the quality of and satisfaction with interactions that influence the partnership. The partnership is important to the development of a mutually supportive relationship (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998). AR3 continued, “Someone who has a positive view of the university stands to reason that they would have a greater proclivity of giving money and supporting goals of the university.” AR3 believes this can only be done by “creating a personal connection between our office and the alumni volunteers, benefiting both sides, through working together to create positive change and positive programs,” Business uses this strategy to build relationships with customers. Retailers “make conscious attempts to influence their environments through their exchange” (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000, p. 284). In respect to alumni relations, AR3 added, “We're able to work with them and guide them and we, in turn, take their feedback and help improve our alumni programs.” This
viewpoint supports Gummesson’s argument that “successful implementation of strategic marketing requires adopting a relationship paradigm between the company and its customer,” indicating the importance of businesses needing to understand customers (as cited by Nijssen & Frambach, 2001, p. 52).

AR3 continued to provide interesting insight into the make-up of CU alumni. Some alumni like “a solitary volunteer opportunity, something that somebody does on his/her own. It depends on their disposition, some people like to do things in groups, some people can do both, and do both.” AR3 seemed to have a clear grasp of the variety of needs of these alumni, “Sometimes they don't know [that they want to participate] and they don't know until you contact them.” Persistence often pays off for AR3 as explained, “They don't know until they get invited to something and they come, show up, and they discover that they missed [the university] and they really like going back.” This alumni association works to keep alumni satisfied so that they do not disengage, a more costly venture. Alumni relations officers constantly learn about what might lead to alumni inactivity and create opportunities for them to stay engaged. The underlying argument for building customer relationships is the belief that replacing lost customers is more costly and inefficient than working to keep existing customers satisfied and committed (Reichheld & Teal, 1996). In alumni relations, the opposite practice is necessary for full alumni participation.

The model that best describes the alumni relationship building process at CU was identified by AR3 as “a circle where you start at the bottom when the person decides to apply and he/she is interviewed by an alumnus; and it ends in a complete circle with ever increasing engagement that brings them back to interaction with prospective students.”
This is an example of binding alumni for a lifetime. AR3 ended the interview with a fitting antidote, “One older alumnus came to me and said with an exasperated tone, ‘We’re not customers, we’re alumni,’ and I said, ‘No, you’re not, you are our customer and we're providing a service to you, and that service must be excellent ALWAYS.’” AR3 understands the value of serving customers and seems positioned to use the important principles of relationship marketing in the alumni relations office at CU.

(RQ2) Documentary evidence of concepts used to building relationships.

Customer service is often influenced by the quality of and satisfaction with the services rendered. AR3 provided this context, “In higher education, there sometimes can be a temptation to deliver second best.” However, this is not good enough for the work of the alumni association. Under AR3’s leadership, “We want to create and we want to meet the highest expectations.” AR3 also stressed the importance of “looking at the alum [sic] as customers and providing them the best services possible so that they have a positive view of the University.” This shows an example of the importance of providing quality service in maintaining customer service and retention (Berry, 1995).

Value, as previously stated, is defined as a customer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perception of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990). AR3 explained the alumni association’s role in providing value. “Our purpose is to demonstrate that we [the alumni association] are adding value to the university.” AR3 continued, “So when we are able to prove that more people are attending reunions, more clubs are being formed, more events are taking place, more people are using our web tools that shows that we are providing value to the university.” While value is a key relationship marketing concept, these examples are only helpful to
the extent that increased numbers imply satisfaction, and they do not address perception of what quality is received.

AR3 discussed strategies in alumni programs and services to keep customers loyal and committed, “We try to focus on delivering the kind of experience that they would expect to receive if they were to go to a resort, or a high level conference like the Aspen Institute, as we do not want to deliver a poorly executed academic event.” Alumni, like customers, will remain committed if they trust that they will receive quality services. Trust refers to the confidence that the customer has in the retailer’s reliability and integrity to deliver the goods and services (Proctor, 2000). “When provided with quality experiences, alumni tend to maintain connection with alma mater,” explained AR3, “They are customers after graduation,” because of the trust Collegiate University alumni have placed in their alma mater.

(RQ3) Documentary evidence of how bonding encourages participation.

According to Berry (1995), relationship marketing can be practiced on multiple levels depending on the type of bond(s) used. For Collegiate University using financial bonds encourages alumni participation. AR3 explained “alumni participation is another way of describing alumni engagement, a description of the positive connection that the university can create with an alumnus or alumni.” This engagement starts early on at CU. AR3 spoke of student-focused programming during undergraduate years, “As a part of the university’s summer reading project, the alumni association sends them [the student] a bookmark with information about the alumni association and alumni programming.” This is a subtle way of providing a small reward or benefit to the student in the early days
of their academic career. This financial bond in the form of a gift encourages students to
connect with the university, and specifically with the alumni association.

Another example of a financial bond is the alumni brick walkway, a program to
celebrate a connection to the university by purchasing and naming a brick in the walkway
(Website, January 18, 2010). For alumni, the act of buying a brick and having it placed in
the walkway creates a bond with the institution, not only a financial bond, but also an
emotional one of pride. Current students who over a four year period often pass by the
walkway and note the connections alumni have with CU.

The CU alumni association website (2010) explains how an alumnus can get
involved on many levels, an indirect reference to bonding levels. The website is
purposely designed to provide financial bonding opportunities that involve cost saving
incentives for free membership and communication. Upon graduation, CU students can
click on the website and automatically become lifetime members of the alumni
association for free. This strong financial bond initiates ties early between the newly
minted alumni and their alma mater. The website also explains how to obtain benefits by
subscribing to the alumni association free electronic newsletter. As financial incentives
increase, particularly those that represent savings, individuals are likely to perceive the
organization is committed to them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa,
1986). As the website draws alumni in and provides information on how to obtain
valuable benefits, alumni will perceive that the university through the alumni association
is committed to them. In addition, the career navigator tool provides CU alumni with
components such as self-assessment, research, job search, and networking (CU website,
January 18, 2010). While the primary focus of this service is for job search and career connection, it is also a financial bond that connects alumni to their alma mater.

While financial bonds rely on economic factors to gain customer loyalty, they are considered to be the weakest type of bonding activity and are typically only seen as important at the beginning of a relationship (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2008). Alumni can understand the financial benefit of website tool when networking results in a job. CU does not only provide services that bind alumni financially to their alma mater, it also provides programs to positively engage alumni through social bonds.

Social bonding is a level developed through ongoing personal interaction and communication with customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Alumni participation is enhanced by the involvement of other alumni. This involvement is a form of social bonding that is similar to the marketing concept of branding, in which customers use a product because others use it (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). Collegiate University provides programs and services to create social bonds.

Applying Dwyer, Schurr and Oh’s (1987) framework of the process, social bonds develop at CU through awareness and exploration of the programs and services offered. Graduates become aware of alumni programming opportunities through the alumni website, newsletters, magazines, and through use of social networking tools. The website explains the importance of “participating in university events and activities near you,” another suggestion of a social bond; a level of relationship marketing developed through ongoing personal interactions with customers (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Alumni connections often depend on “whether their friends are participating,” according to AR3. Reunion weekend, an event for specific class year schoolmates to get together,
provides “a great way to stay in touch with your friends by providing the network to stay in touch with your friends” (CU website, January 18, 2010). It is apparent that there is “a viable alumni network of friends” at Collegiate University (CU website, January 18, 2010). According to AR3, “You register for a reunion, your name goes on a list, and the people registering can also see your name. As the names build, more and more people register because they see that it’s OK to go because other people are going.” CU alumni association implemented this strategy for reunions to allow alumni to see who else is attending the reunion, and has found that is the best way to drive attendance. CU’s also offers women’s mentoring program that helps create a buyer-seller relationship through social bonding. This program is designed to help senior-year women navigate the transition from campus to life beyond (CU website, January 18, 2010).

A major objective for alumni associations is to get customers to commit funds, time, and other resources to the universities (Kotler & Andreason, 1997). According to AR3, “A positively engaged alumnus has a greater proclivity to give money to the university.” Alumni have “a desire to give back to the university, a desire to provide some volunteer services beyond what they are doing already, and a desire to be with people with same shared experiences” This bonding through social experiences finds alumni with motivations “everything from the most altruistic, to the opportunistic, and lots of variations in between that drives their interest to connect.”

These examples demonstrate the importance of social bonds in building relationships that connect the university with the alumni. CU also provides programs and services to positively engage alumni through bonding levels other than social bonds.
However, the desire to give back to the university and interest in service others needs further exploration within the relationship marketing context.

Structural bonds represent the most effective way to secure customer loyalty (Berry, 1995). CU provides opportunities for “learning the ropes of volunteering; successful volunteer leadership leads to increased engagement and makes you a candidate for other leadership roles, including association governance,” (CU website, January 18, 2010). As stated previously, these structural bond activities provide vectors creating impediments to the termination of the relationship (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000). Other programs providing opportunities of bonding at a structural level include the university alumni prospective student review, a program for alumni to give back by sharing their time to interview prospective CU students. By being a part of the decision-making process for student matriculation, the alumni are empowered, forming a structural bond. Once the structural bond is formed, the relationship is solidified. Collegiate University also empowers alumni by encouraging them to serve as a club officer or on the reunion committee. Many do take on these leadership roles, as AR3 explained, “They [alumni] are hoping if they have a son or daughter some day that might want to apply to the institution, and they want to prove to the institution that they are committed.” This is an interesting example of the motivation for involvement and an expansion of structural bonding.

AR3 further elaborated, “People have a very deep emotional connection to their college or university, a place they've attended for 4-years during a very formative time in their lives.” AR3 believes the institution “played an important part in people's lives such as family, or religion. It’s becoming more difficult for people to attain goals, as it
becomes more difficult for people to earn a living, to keep the family together.” An intriguing finding is that emotional bonds apparently play a role in connecting alumni to the institution, as is evident with CU alumni. AR3 described this emotional bond by saying that “one stable thing in your life was the university, and it is never going to go away, and it's always going to accept you back into her arms.” This level of emotional bond does not appear in the relationship marketing literature, suggesting that customers may not emotionally attach to suppliers, in the same way that alumni connect with their alma maters.

**Summary.**

According to AR3, CU’s model of a complete circle depicts how alumni participate using relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonds at the financial, social, and structural level. AR3 said the intention is that after graduation, “The alum [sic] joins the [CU alumni association] club in the community, and then goes on the (university) club board and helps organize activities for other young alumni. When she is slightly older she becomes a class officer and helps organize a reunion, she then becomes active in the annual fund, always giving every year in larger and larger increments, and she then moves up and become a member of the board of the alumni association. Professionally, and socially, individuals can drive tremendous benefits from it [alumni participation], from being an alumni volunteer, and then they will move all the way up the ladder to the highest level.” These stages [levels] of bonding are supported in a study investigating the shortage of nurses in the health care industry found that relationships develop through a three stage bonding process (Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). The same may be said for alumni relations at CU: the alumnus connects by moving
through relationship marketing bonds at the financial, social, and structural level. However, in alumni relations, an additional bond appears at the emotional level. CU utilizes all three levels, but the prevalence of this emotional level represents an interesting finding which needs further exploration.

**Diploma University**

Diploma University, located between large metropolitan cities on the East Coast, has roots tracing back to the mid 1600s (Diploma University website, May 31, 2010). Committing to undergraduate education and emphasizing the development of leaders are two values that distinguish this institution from other great global universities (Diploma University website, August 22, 2010). Diploma University intends to build on its accomplishments through its academic contributions to the nation and the world.

In the late 1700s, Diploma University (DU) alumni elected its first class officers and began a cycle of reunions among alumni groups, eventually refined to the 5-year system of class reunions observed today (DU website, September 5, 2010). To meet the broad and varied interests and concerns of DU alumni, an alumni board was chartered in the early 1900s, as the central alumni leadership (DU website, September 5, 2010). This board was empowered to facilitate exchange of ideas between the DU and its alumni. To develop a more responsive alumni structure, in the mid 20th century the Association of Diploma Alumni was organized and the ties between DU and her alumni were strengthened (DU website, September 5, 2010).

**Profile of participant.**

The chief alumni relations officer (AR4) at Diploma University has 4-years of experience in this position. A graduate of DU, this leader discussed the hopes for the
coming year and challenges working with college alumni (DU newspaper article, 2006). During the newspaper interview AR4 said, “This is my way of giving back, to change lives.” This message was consistently heard throughout the case study interview. Prior to accepting this position, AR4 pursued a career in non-profit work, a philosophy expressed by AR4 as “it’s not all about the money.” AR4 views the DU alumni constituency similar to that of a nonprofit organization, “As individuals in need of connection” (DU newspaper article, 2006).

Under AR4’s leadership, 37 alumni relations staff members attempt to motivate DU alumni to donate their time and talent to others (Newsletter, 2006). AR4 expressed, “Our alumni office is well staffed and structured to meet the needs of our alumni” (DU interview, March 23, 2010). Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (1991) studied organizations using the relationship marketing framework, which includes meeting the needs of its customers, and explained how they are organized around the customers and other stakeholders. Consistent with the relationship marketing model, each staff member at DU has an area of responsibility specific to programs and services offered to meet alumni interest (DU alumni staff directory, 2010). AR4 explained how the staff works in teams on specific events and provides various programs to their alumni. Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000) argue that a team focused approach on customer acquisition will assure work teams are multifunctional in meeting the customer’s needs. A focus of relationship marketing is the link between the business and the customer. DU alumni relations officers’ focus on strengthening this link with alumni by providing for their interests and needs.
Mission of alumni association.

The mission and focus of Diploma University alumni association is to foster greater ties between alumni and the university (Newspaper article, 2006). The DU alumni association serves more than 150,000 alumni while supporting the interests of the university (DU website, August 22, 2010). This concept of linking alumni to the institution is central to its purpose that it is framed in the Alumni Constitution (2008) as stated, “The purpose shall be to serve interests of the University and the alumni; to provide a channel of communication between the alumni and the University; to oversee the alumni organization and programs; and to provide the means to review alumni policies and programs.” In addition, the association fosters lifelong connections to the University, to serve its graduates, and to enable them to be effective contributors to the University.

As stated in a DU newspaper article (2006), alumni organize in shared interest groups through “an enabling platform to allow an alumnus who has certain shared interests to come back and be part of that now.” By identifying the specific shared interest of the alumnus, leads to a valuable interaction with the institution. This one-to-one interaction with the customer [alumni] to determine and meet his or her interests should lead to improved lifetime value for the institution (Gordon, 1998).

Findings.

Explored in this case study were the ways in which Diploma University applies relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to its alumni programs.
(RQ1) Documentary evidence of principles used to strengthen ties.

Customer acquisition is an essential first step in the relationship building process, with the strength of the relationship influenced by the quality of and satisfaction with interactions as the buyer-seller partnership evolves (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998). AR4 explained, “The student becomes the target audience earlier in their matriculation and they [students] recognize that there is going to be a role for alumni stewardship in the future as they become involved in our reunions.” However, AR4’s conversations quickly turned away from students to alumni as DU’s main focus. The process of acquiring alumni happens during the undergraduate years. However, a concentrated effort occurs as they become young alumni, attend reunions, and identify with shared interest groups.

The importance of meeting the interests of the individual first and foremost is evident in AR4’s definition of alumni participation, “To engage alumni in their interests and their passions for their university and on behalf of their university” (DU interview, March 22, 2010). AR4 articulated the charge for the alumni association, “My job is not to instill passion, my job is to find passion where it is and mine it. Our job is to identify, recruit, and cultivate alumni who will be leaders in pursuing the mission of the institution.” This thought of “giving” as alumni leaders, rather than “giving” to alumni what they desire was a clear contrast to the other three.

AR4 also expressed, “Many alumni view their ties to Diploma University with a club mentality, believing they should receive benefits due to their status as alums [sic].” AR4 believes, “It’s not what you get as alumni, but what you give” (DU newspaper article, 2006). This demonstrates a disconnection between AR4 and the alumni regarding the use of the relationship marketing principle of putting individuals first. It seems like
DU uses the one-to-one marketing principle to find interests of alumni, but then shifts to how important alumnus giving opportunities are to his/her alma mater.

A common theme expressed by AR4 throughout the interview was the importance of seeing the alumni as a valuable asset. It was clear from the interview that AR4, on behalf of DU, expressed that alumni will contribute to DU, “We want alumni to give not only treasure, but time and talent.” Not only are donor contributions important, but so is the “depth and breadth of their time and talent,” according to AR4. Many alumni have specific talents that DU values, including, but not limited to, alumni who mentor students, alumni who network with alumni for job possibilities, and alumni whose volunteer efforts are shared among others. This represents a twist on relationship marketing where the retailer provides the customer with reasons to stay in the relationship. At DU the expectation is that alumni [customer] will provide the institution [retailer] with relationship building elements. While it has the components of the relationship marketing model as it is commonly understood, they are applied in reverse.

AR4 discussed the many shared interest groups, “We have a separate Black alumni association that actually works to recruit minority students. We have an ethnic and identity alumni association that work hard to assure we have a diverse university. We have young alumni programs and family programs that make sure that we touch alumni at all of their life's stages.” These programs that meet the needs of particular shared interest groups are wonderful examples of services fitting to satisfy and retain customers (Voss & Voss, 1997). AR4 expanded on this principle, “You have to meet the needs and expectations of alumni and volunteers, and their need to give.” Satisfying customer needs is considered critical for the company’s long-term financial success (Nijssen &
Frambach, 2001). AR4 accepts the concept of meeting needs, but adds to it a quality that includes giving back of time, talent, and treasure.

Although AR4 did not use relationship marketing terminology, it was apparent the principle tenet was understood as AR4 expressed, “So the other paradigm shift here is moving from an organization that is institutionally needs driven to donor volunteer needs driven.” AR4 continued, “It's not necessarily the needs of the institution that we look to meet, it's the needs of the volunteers and the alumni. We fulfill their need to give.” Using the second stage of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh’s (1987), the relationship marketing process consists of exploration through attraction. When the attraction is to give, there appears to be a unique bond that develops, one based on emotional connections to the alma mater. This attraction does present an interesting approach in which the relationship is two-way with the focus on the contribution the alumni makes to the institution, but in which nothing is exchanged.

AR4 explained how the alumni association operates, “Out of a culture of abundance not scarcity.” This was further clarified as AR4 articulated, “Alumni have more time and talents, and we know that alumni want to give. Our job is to fulfill and meet their need to give.” Newell (1997) explains that by knowing the customer, a company learns to think like a customer. AR4 elaborated, “They may not know that they have that need until we give them the opportunity to work in a situation where they feel fulfilled.” Newell further outlines that by knowing how effectively customers move through the process and, given the opportunity, flourish. This life-cycle perspective in relationship building helps alumni to fulfill their need to give for years to come. If customer needs are met, they will return for future purchases.
More importantly, AR4 said, “Alumni need to know they are making a difference, and they want to know that when they invest their time and talent, they are making a difference.” AR4 expounded on this point, “We need to make sure that we provide alumni with a meaningful experience, so that when they step back at the end of the day and look at the time and the talent, yes, even the treasure, they may have invested in this organization.” The alumni will conclude that they were difference makers and their loyalty to DU allows good things to happen. Being a difference maker seems to be a value at Diploma University. This meaningful experience enhances the marketer-customer interactions and is strategically designed to earn and keep customers loyal (Berry, 1995) AR4 said alumni are proud that they can say “they made a difference and they moved the needle.” AR4 understands the importance of long term loyalty and its link to the value alumni find in the relationship. AR4 seems to be saying that the value is intrinsic, that giving back is its own reward. Alumni are building ties based on some feeling that they are doing good, and do not seem to get much in return from the actual giving except that it supports DU. They give to build a greater good which enables alumni to help the continued growth of alma mater.

“Our staff engages alumni on a one-to-one basis, much like a development office concentrates on major donors, we concentrate on major volunteers. We will match them up with the right program. We challenge them with volunteer opportunities so that if they burn out on one, or they get tired of one, or if they're just looking for a new challenge. We always have a new opportunity to put in front of them.” This suggests a meaningful way to continually meet the needs of the individual, over a lifetime of commitment. Newell (1997) expressed that knowing where the customers are falling out of the
relationship, and making necessary corrections to keep them involved, is an example of adopting a life-cycle perspective for building relationships. DU does this by continually meeting with alumni to determine their changing needs.

Diploma University alumni participation encompasses a broad spectrum that includes lifelong learning opportunities: career networking; engaging through college classes, clubs and associations; and other shared interest groups. Specifically, these shared interest groups have undertaken a transformational change in recent years and reflect changing alumni interests: sports groups, religious affiliations, theatrical and music interests, and cultural groups, to name a few (DU website, October 9, 2010). Expansion and transformation is seen in the third stage of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh’s (1987) framework of the relationship marketing process. The alumni association recently undertook an aggressive strategic planning process aimed at assisting the association with expansion and transformation. The results of this planning process meld traditional strength with a new vision (DU strategic plan, 2007; DU website, March 4, 2010).

During the first year of the planning process, the emphasis was on alumni serving as ambassadors of the institution, coming together in shared identity groups; changing the world through service and a global leadership exchange; presenting leadership forums; and sharing in a day of service, to name a few (DU state of association report, November, 2008). In the second year, the emphasis was enhancing these programs, as well as on engaging in alumni relations summits; organizing alumni service corps; establishing a new way to travel; and creating more effective communication (DU state of association report, November, 2009). This strategic planning effort resulted in a more ambitious way to serve Diploma University with a focus on shared interest groups, age-tailored
programs, expanded educational opportunities, and increased support to clubs in major cities (DU strategic plan, 2007). The strategic plan is an example of providing a more focus one-to-one interaction with customers [alumni] and leads to improved lifetime value (Gordon, 1982).

By strengthening traditional activities, providing new programs and services, creating new opportunities to serve, and by providing better support to volunteer leaders, alumni can become ambassadors for Diploma University (DU strategic plan, final version, 2010). In becoming ambassadors, they also strengthen the connections between themselves and DU. Using the third stage of Dwyer, Schurr and Oh’s (1987) framework of the relationship marketing process which is expansion supports DU’s commitment to build a more aggressive volunteer support program. According to AR4, “This powerful experience of strategic planning continually promotes the concept of serial reciprocity, an identifier of all Diploma University alumni.” The overarching goal of the new strategic plan is not only to keep pace with changing needs and expectations, but also to lead in “anticipating your needs as volunteers to better serve Diploma University” (DU state of union report, November 2009). This anticipation and satisfaction of customer needs support Nijssen and Frambach’s (2001) argument that satisfaction is considered critical for the company’s long-term financial success in the marketplace. When alumni are satisfied with what Diploma University represents, they respond by giving of their time, talent, and treasure.

AR4 suggested, “We want to serve our alumni, but in the ultimate analysis, we want to enable them to give to us.” This alumni relations officer feels “that is the difference in the equation between customer-based and enabling stakeholders.” For the
purpose of this study, stakeholders and customers are one in the same, whereas AR4 essentially wanted to separate the two. AR4 might see it from the perspective that customers just take, and stakeholders both give and take. Though AR4 might not admit it, it appears that when building relationships with the stakeholders, much like that argued by Gronroos (1990), AR4 takes a customer-minded perspective.

(RQ2) Documentary evidence of concepts used to building relationships.

Relationship marketing is based on healthy relationships typified by concern, trust, commitment, and service (Proctor, 2000). What inspire alumni at Diploma University are the commitment and loyalty seen through “volunteers doing this job because they love it,” explained AR4, “It [volunteerism] is probably one of the most important functions of the alumni association.” Volunteerism is one of the cornerstone activities for alumni at DU. They plant trees, tutor school children, donate food, mentor job seekers, serve at soup kitchens, and clean up parks. These are just a few out of a myriad ways that DU alumni give back to their communities in the name of their alma mater. According to AR4, “That level of engagement and involvement [by alumni] leads to a lifetime of community, family for life.” DU alumni engage in lifetime of loyalty and commitment on behalf of the university. AR4 continued, “It’s an incredibly talented and remarkably gifted group of people and perhaps most important is the sense of stewardship our alumni feel.” Volunteerism by DU alumni developed from the confidence and trust they place in their university because it provided them quality educational experiences. In turn, they now give back using their talents as graduates and their connections as alumni to do so. AR4, a graduate of DU, expressed, “We should be held accountable for the great privilege that we have to attend this place.” This great
privilege allows for healthy relationships to develop between alumni, and between alumni and alma mater, in whose name they gather to provide services to others.

In relationship marketing, the value is in the relationship. How alumni come to know that DU values them is seen when alumni are asked by the leadership to give back to society and to DU. AR4 spoke a great deal about this healthy relationship and giving back as the prevalent value for these alumni. According to AR4, “It is all about the conveyance of values, whether it is giving to the University or giving back to society.” This is an example of one relationship marketing principle, when a customer is satisfied with the worth of the product or service, the relationship between the customer and provider is strengthened (Voss & Voss, 1997). In the business model, customers perceive value in relationships which encourage maintaining the relationship. Diploma University alumni seem to perceive value in emotional and intellectual connections which, in turn, results in participation.

AR4 explained, “Diploma University alumni are very proud of their alma mater, a pride of ownership, and their contribution to their university is sharing their time, talent and treasure” in its name. “Pride in place, it's shared cultural values, it's a common experience and ultimately, our goal is enhancement of the reputation of the university,” acknowledged AR4. Most importantly to alumni, according to AR4 it is “their efforts that they were able to inspire in other alumni.” This sense of passion and shared value in their alma mater, seems to evoke emotion and a sense of pride.

(RQ3) Documentary evidence of how bonding encourages participation.

Financial, social, and structural bond are examples of practicing relationship marketing on multiple levels. According to AR4, alumni participation is expressed
through the “giving of time, talent, and treasure.” Traditionally, it is measured in terms of
treasure, but AR4 said, “That is only part of the story.” AR4 spoke of financial bonds,
“At first people tend to do things only when it benefits them directly.” At DU, alumni pay
their dues and in return they receive specific services, a financial bond. During the
interview, AR4 briefly touched upon rewards and incentives for encouraging alumni
participation and concluded they were trite. This position is contrary to Ackerman and
Schibrowsky’s (2008) argument that financial bonds, though considered weak, typically
seem very important at the beginning of a relationship. Financial bonds seem to be of
little importance to the alumni of Diploma University. While DU has an alumni dues
structure, they concentrate more on the bonding process at a social level and beyond.

“It’s a growth from what we get as individuals, to what the institution gets, and
then to what other people get because of our actions.” Interestingly, AR4 frequently
mentioned alumni treasure throughout the interview. Whether DU utilizes treasure as a
financial bond, because it involves money, or utilizes another bond, because it involves a
deeper connection, was further explored. AR4 moves their alumni quickly away from this
premise of “what I get,” a financial bond, “to the premise of what other people get
through service,” which appears to be a different bond altogether. This service
component is evident in the business world when one sees companies embracing
community service as an outreach program of their company, but it does not appear in the
business literature as a typical relationship marketing bonding level. This movement from
financial to a service component occurs as alumni socially connect with each other but
the extent to which it contributes to social bonding is not clear.
Alumni socially bond with their alma mater when they attend reunions, participate in service days, and engage in travel programs. This is no different at DU. AR4 indicated that DU focused on building relationships through social engagement and “if DU did that well, some alumni would contribute.” AR4 further explained, “If the alumni come back and actually form an alumni chorus and get up on stage, or travel around the world and perform on behalf of the University, that’s reliving college years in a much more direct and impassioned way, and that is actually one of our success stories.” These examples of social bonding activities also illustrate intellectual and emotional components that seem evident in the context of higher education, but absent in the business world. AR4 continued, “I know this, if we engage alumni intellectually, if we connect with them emotionally, the pocketbook won't be far behind.”

DU’s primary focus is on service to others in the name of the university, a way to connect alumni to the institution. The service component engages alumni on a social level, organizes alumni on a structural level, and connects alumni on an emotional level. According to AR4, “There is a tradition of service, and volunteering is still a cultural norm at Diploma University,” (DU abroad trip article, March, 2009). According to AR4 many alumni have a “shared interest, a shared identity, a class year, or geography” and their interests “may all be overlapping,” AR4 said. “It is whether they want to get involved, and actually roll up their sleeves” that drives their common interest to serve others. Examples of such service projects include a “global day of service where alumni all over the world engage in partnerships with local nonprofits (DU website, March 4, 2010). A more locally oriented service project included over 3000 members of the university community making a difference where they live, through volunteer service in
the name of DU (DU website, March 4, 2010). “Engagement with their classes and with any of the huge number of shared interest groups” helps to define how they will serve others,” explained AR4. They are emotionally tied to each other through the structure of their class and shared interest group.

Through collaborative work with other alumni who are drawn to serve on behalf of their institution, alumni structurally bond as they help change lives. AR4 explained, “We are moving away from an alumni association which provides services to alumni to one that calls alumni to service.” Influencing engagement in service is “their passion and their love of the University and their desire to serve others,” explained AR4. “The role of an alumni association is to encourage alumni to volunteer, enabling them to change lives. They [the alumni association] have to empower the alumni to engage and develop the programming,” expressed AR4. A structural bond results with empowerment between members in the organization (Peltier, Pointer & Schibrowsky, 2006).

AR4 explained how one empowers alumni, “You vest ownership of the program with them.” This is an example of a strategy that demonstrates structurally bonding the alumni to the alma mater. “I’m going to go with them and I’m going to spend a week with them in a strategic planning retreat and say, ‘You envision your future and you tell us how you want it and how can we help you.’ The drive to change other lives and make a difference is one that ultimately binds our alumni together,” explained AR4. Empowerment of alumni, entrusting them with control over decisions, and providing opportunities for collaboration when volunteering and providing service to others, are key structural bonds DU utilizes to encourage alumni participation. AR4 explained that this alumni association “trains world leaders, as we need our alumni rolling up their sleeves
and actually working as the change agents,” to implement the programs needed in various communities across the nation and the world. These structural bonds involve alumni tightly to the core of the institution and in doing so make it difficult for alumni to leave the relationship. Alumni who are tied to DU through structural bonds, like in business, likely participate at higher, more complex levels, than do customers [alumni] who are tied through financial bonds (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000).

AR4 outlined, “Universities, and nonprofit organizations, in general, take for granted that anybody that puts up their hand and volunteers doesn't necessarily have the requisite skills and capabilities to inspire and motivate other alumni and volunteers.” AR4 accentuated, “Those are acquired skills, they can be trained, they can be taught, they can be modeled and leadership development and training are imperative.” Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) found that relationships change, transform through stages, and evolve over time. “Able alumni plan activities for themselves, that they have ownership of the mission and the activities of the alumni themselves. That's true empowerment right?” asked AR4. Using the relationship marketing framework of Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (1991) that addresses the rights of employees, empowering alumni in leadership positions helps to accomplish change. “Over the 200- to 300-year history of the alumni programs, the best programs have been designed and implemented by alumni themselves,” AR4 added. This supports the argument that structural bonds are the hardest bond to break, and also the most productive for both the consumer and the provider.

Service and volunteerism are good examples of social, structural, and emotional bonds between alumni and their alma maters. These examples support the argument by Peltier, Pointer, and Schibrowsky (2006) that collaboration between members in the
organization in which various stakeholder groups acknowledge and value the input of others, helps to achieve the desired organizational goal. Among DU’s goals for the alumni is to serve others and change people’s lives. AR4 spoke of the alumni association in terms of a development model with the engagement of people being very basic. “Here is what I get when I give my dues, very selfish, to one in which they're working hard in which to change other people's lives and there is fulfillment based on that,” said AR4.

The development model used by this alumni association helps move the alumni through the various stages of bonding levels, including an emotional bond which seems unique to higher education. It is not just that DU alumni serve those in need but, importantly that they service in the name of their university.

AR4 talked about “being a family, as an alumni community, not only to generate dollars for the University, but generate goodwill” through the “giving of time, talent, and treasure.” As AR4 talked about treasure that seemed to contribute to another bonding level. A DU alumnus is so committed, so emotional attached to the place, that he/she gives treasure to it. The exchange of money suggests a financial bond, but there may well be more. The institution works to develop relationships with alumni that ultimately result in alumni giving money back to the institution. This might be part of an emotional bond, since clearly the giving of money has an emotional component, much like when a student graduates from DU and those initials become forever a part of who that person is (DU newspaper article, 2006). AR4 believes, “Alumni maintain emotional connections to alma mater decades after leaving,” a type of bond more closely associated with colleges and universities, than in business.
Summary.

Often mentioned by AR4 was the concept of serial reciprocity. At first, the researcher was unfamiliar with the term and concept, but after seeing it referred throughout the interview and within the documents provided, it was apparent that giving of time, talent, and treasure and giving often reflected the theme that is so endearing to alumni of Diploma University. The responsibility bestowed upon these alumni, as a way to honor the opportunities given to them as DU students, supports giving back in the name of the university by changing lives through service to others.

It is evident this alumni association applies relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to encourage alumni engagement. The alumni association focuses on leveraging the talents of the alumni membership in a meaningful way so that alumni are interested in giving to the organization. An emotional bond to enhance the alumni-alma mater relationship seems evident at DU; however, this bond appears different than those associated with relationship marketing in business.

Overview

Chapter 4 provided the data analysis from each multiple-site case study. Chapter 5 will blend the data collected from all case study sites through a cross-case synthesis, presents the findings, and provides recommendations for further research.
The purpose of this study was to determine if, and in what ways, relationship marketing was used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters. In chapter 4, the researcher explored programs used by alumni relations officers to bond alumni to campus at four private, research institutions and reported those findings. In this chapter, a cross-case synthesis was applied to the analysis of the findings from the multiple-site case studies.

Statement of Problem

Institutions of higher education are challenged to identify and nurture revenue streams. Establishing relationships between alumni and the university has the potential of becoming a vital revenue stream. Alumni participation rates at private, high intensive research institutions range from 0 to 46 percent (CAE-VSE, 2007). A challenge for colleges and universities is engaging alumni early so that when they have the capacity to make more substantial gifts, they will include alma maters in their philanthropic plans. Relationship marketing is a strategy used in business that may also apply in higher education to engage alumni with their alma maters. Given the potential importance of alumni giving, but the apparent difficulty in establishing successful relationships with alumni, there is benefit in understanding whether relationship marketing is currently used to encourage graduates to become supporters of their alma maters.

Research Questions

As presented in chapter 4, the analysis of the four site case studies provided answers to the research questions guiding this study:
1. In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters;

2. In what ways are relationship marketing concepts used in selected alumni programs to build relationships with alumni; and

3. In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation?

**Review of Method**

The researcher employed a qualitative multiple-site case study research method (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). A purposeful sample of four research intensive universities was drawn from the CAE-VSE Survey (2007), a national database. The participation rate percentage was used to select the sample. The researcher interviewed senior alumni relations officers, collected and reviewed various supporting documents, and made general observations of the institution’s alumni relations website. The data collection helped to determine in what ways relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels were applied in alumni relations to encourage alumni participation.

Specifically developed for case study research, document and content analyses were utilized for this study (Yin, 2003). Using a descriptive approach, known as “framework” by Richie and Spencer (as cited in Bryman & Burgess, 1994), the five stages framework involved a systematic process of sifting, charting, and sorting materials according to key issues and themes. To code the data, the researcher utilized Atlas.ti software along with the time honored method of cutting and pasting data. This approach provided a focused concentration on the interpretation of the data for the cross-case
synthesis. The researcher investigated similarities and differences among the case studies, accomplishing this through the use of the Atlas.ti software.

**Comparison of Findings**

For data collection, the researcher applied three basic principles: (a) chain of evidence; (b) database management; and (c) triangulation. The researcher constructed a chain of evidence using a case study protocol (Appendix B). This allows other researchers interested in pursuing this line of inquiry the ability to utilize the evidence protocol developed for this exploratory study. The researcher created and completed a case study database table (Appendix E) that included notes, documents, tabular materials, and narratives. Using multiple sources of data increases markedly the reliability of the case study and allowed the researcher to develop converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2003). Finally, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) triangulation of data array corroborates the different data sources and provides a better understanding of the data collected (Table 3). It should be noted, while a member check was requested from all participants, only two participants responded. Therefore, other sources of evidence were used to triangulate the data and substantiate cross-case study findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Triangulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documents review</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website review</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Member check</td>
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</table>
Three of the institutions studied were considered metropolitan institutions, while one was located bordering an urban center. Known for research intensive, high academic standards, each university studied has academic roots dating back to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Each institution emphasizes quality undergraduate instruction, but what differentiate these universities are the characteristics that define them to their students: Academic University emphasizes character development; Baccalaureate University stresses the creation and spread of knowledge; Collegiate University intends to develop leaders who design their own educational plans; and finally, Diploma University emphasizes service by enabling its students to become great leaders who contribute to society.

Using a cross-case synthesis, comparing the extent to which these universities apply relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels in alumni programs was further analyzed.

(RQ1) Applying Relationship Marketing Principles to Alumni Relations

Given the findings from all four institutions, the researcher compared and contrasted the ways relationship marketing principles were used to strengthen ties between the alumni and their alma maters (Table 4).

All of the alumni relations officers referred to alumni participation as alumni engagement, but each had a different perspective on engagement. Academic University alumni relations officer expressed that “we cultivate, we are old friend builders;” Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer said, “Alumni engage with the university and with each other;” Collegiate University alumni relations officer stated, “Engagement is the positive connection the university can create with alumni;” and
Diploma University alumni relations officer said, “Alumni participation provides opportunities to give back…in time, talent, and treasure.”

Table 4  Findings—Relationship Marketing Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early acquisition is the first step</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>BU</th>
<th>CU</th>
<th>DU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters written to students during admission process</td>
<td>Send-off parties thrown for newly admitted students</td>
<td>Beginning this initiative, but did not historically do</td>
<td>Annual reunion involves current students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer needs over retailer needs</td>
<td>Alumni don’t interrupt our business, they are our business</td>
<td>Meet needs of diverse alumni</td>
<td>Don’t know what they want; persuadable alumni</td>
<td>We find alumni’s passion and mine it; shared interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one interaction - meet the interest of the customer</td>
<td>Individualized programs/services at local clubs</td>
<td>Several different cohorts with individual interests</td>
<td>Takes individual’s feedback to improve programs</td>
<td>Match alumni with right programs; burn out on one provide other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services designed to retain customers</td>
<td>Mentoring and networking opportunities</td>
<td>Services must be “of full range;” Cannot be pigeonholed</td>
<td>Excellent services; inactive alumni programs</td>
<td>Services must be “diverse;” as young alumni differ than older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In business, as the buyer-seller partnership evolves early customer acquisition is the first step in the relationship marketing process and strengthens the relationship influenced by the quality of and satisfaction with interactions (Peltier, Boyt, & Westfall, 1998). Applying this principle by these four alumni relations officers included letters to prospective students during the admission process, pre-admission parties for potential students, send-off parties for newly admitted students, and freshman students working alumni reunions. Partnerships evolve when the alumni relations officer at Academic University writes congratulatory letters to admitted students and meets with new students shortly after they arrive on campus; when the alumni relations officer at Academic
University and Baccalaureate University host send-off parties for prospective students; and when the alumni relations officer at Diploma University involves current students at reunions. The alumni relations officer at Collegiate University admitted that, historically, Collegiate University had not contacted prospective students during the admissions process, but has recently begun the practice because the initiative seems to work quite well on other campuses.

A basic relationship marketing principle is meeting the needs of the customer (Nijssen & Frambach, 2001). Each alumni relations officer provided evidence of satisfying alumni needs through specific programs and services: networking to help alumni find jobs or assist them in seeking career advancement by using networking among alumni; selective programming for shared interest groups interested in academic enrichment; and local, regional, and international alumni clubs. The alumni relations officer at Academic University proclaimed, “Alumni do not interrupt our business, they are our business,” and diligently trains a staff to meet the needs of each alumnus. The alumni relations officer at Collegiate University argued that some alumni do not know what they want until they get involved, and are known as persuadable alumni. This alumni relations officer further explained how the alumni relations office acts as an incubator for the henhouse, allowing the staff to work with alumni and guide them in their interests. The alumni relations officer at Diploma University takes on the responsibility to find alumni’s passions and mine them by providing meaningful experiences designed for shared interest groups. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer spoke in terms of providing selective programs to meet the needs of a diverse alumni base and acknowledged the diversity among alumni. A goal they all
shared is to use programs and services to meet the needs of alumni while also recognizing the individuality of each alumnus. Each alumni relations officer designs his/her programs and services differently, perhaps reflecting the uniqueness of each university.

Providing individualized programming to meet the interest of the alumnus utilizes a “customer-minded” perspective (Gronoos, 1990). According to Gordon (1998), one-to-one interaction with customers leads to improved lifetime value. These four alumni relations officers practice relationship marketing principles using a “customer-minded” perspective through one-to-one programming: Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer engages alumni with their several different individual interests; Academic University alumni relations officer provides individualized programming with local clubs; Collegiate University alumni relations officer takes individual feedback to improve programs; and Diploma University alumni relations officer matches specific programs for alumni, but then shifted to how important alumnus giving opportunities are to his/her alma mater (Table 4).

According to Nijssen and Frambach (2001) successful implementation of strategic marketing requires adopting a relationship marketing paradigm between the company and its customers with the aim to retain customers. The full range of services provided by these four alumni relations officers were designed to facilitate the alumni retention through engagement. Ethnic identity groups, young alumni groups, family oriented groups, and service driven groups are provided support services by the associations to initiate involvement and to retain alumni participation. Academic University alumni relations officer uses career services, mentoring, and networking opportunities to build partnerships. Diploma University alumni relations officer explained that programs
provided to young alumni differed from those provided to older alumni. Young alumni enjoying social activities, such as wine tastings, while older alumni engage in intellectual activities, such as travel abroad programs. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer noted that alumni cannot be pigeonholed and must be provided a full range of services since this alumni population consists of persons with diverse needs and interests. Collegiate University alumni relations officer spoke of some alumni being inactive; staff must reach out to create opportunities for them to participate and service must be excellent in order for alumni to value them. Each of these alumni relations officers had in place programs and initiatives to retain alumni. While the approaches differed, they all acknowledged that to retain alumni one-to-one marketing is important, although Diploma University alumni relations officer used the one-to-one marketing principle differently. Diploma University alumni relations officers find out what interests each alumnus, but then shift to how important alumnus giving opportunities are to his/her alma mater.

Also important to relationship marketing are various concepts used to develop relationships. The extent to which these institutions apply certain relationship marketing concepts in alumni programs was analyzed using a cross-case comparison.

(RQ2) Identifying Relationship Marketing Concepts within Alumni Programs

Given the findings from all four institutions, the researcher compared and contrasted the ways relationship marketing concepts were used in select alumni programs to build relationships with alumni (Table 5). The researcher analyzed whether alumni relations officers built relationships with their alumni by applying these relationship marketing concepts: (a) quality of service, (b) value, (c) loyalty and commitment, and (d) trust.
### Table 5  Findings-Relationship Marketing Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>BU</th>
<th>CU</th>
<th>DU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Service – service meets expectation</td>
<td>Career services and sport weekends</td>
<td>Quality interaction influences satisfaction</td>
<td>Best service possible = positive view of university</td>
<td>Quality education results in volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value - solidifies the relationship</td>
<td>High graduation = what it stands for at AU</td>
<td>Over 20,000 alumni return annually</td>
<td>More attend reunions; more clubs form; more use web</td>
<td>Quality service = sharing time, talent and treasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty – perception of rebuying</td>
<td>Legacy admissions</td>
<td>250 years of lifetime engagement</td>
<td>High level experiences = commitment</td>
<td>Alumni feel a sense of stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust - deliver the goods and services</td>
<td>“What we do is: we back up what we say with what we do</td>
<td>I am here, I earned my place, and I will become an alumnus</td>
<td>Quality experiences = “customers following graduation”</td>
<td>“We should be held accountable to the great privilege we have to attend DU”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incorporating these business relationship marketing concepts to connect alumni to their alma maters were evident in examples offered by these alumni relations officers. These four alumni relations officers referred to building relationships as a key component to alumni engagement, but each had a different approach on how to best engage alumni. Each alumni relations officer stressed excellent customer service, influenced by the quality of and satisfaction with interactions between and among alumni, faculty, staff, and students.

According to the alumni relations officer, Academic University offers programs that are typically appreciated by alumni because of the quality of the programs such as career services, sports weekends, and alumni vacation experiences for families.

Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer explained it is the quality interaction and engagement with fellow alumni and with their university at reunions and
alumni days that influence alumni satisfaction. Collegiate University alumni relations officer emphasized the importance of “looking at the alumni as customers and providing them the best services possible so they have a positive view of the University.” These are examples of the importance of providing quality service in maintaining customer service and retention (Berry, 1995). Diploma University alumni relations officer noted that volunteerism, the cornerstone of this institution, develops because the university provided a quality educational experience. Giving back in the name of Diploma University is a privilege resulting from this gift of a quality education.

In relationship marketing it is important that products and services are of sufficient value to strengthen the relationship marketing. Each alumni relations officer stressed the importance of perceived value of the product and service, as seen in a quality education. According to Voss and Voss (1997), measure of value is based on perceived quality. Academic University alumni relations officer explained how their alumni are proud of the quality education resulting in high graduation rates and what it stands for at their university. Diploma University alumni relations officer explained how alumni are also proud of their alma mater, a pride of ownership in the quality education they obtained. Collegiate University alumni relations officer spoke how over 20,000 alumni come back annually, see each other, and reinforce friendships. Collegiate University alumni relations officer enumerated programs and services: when more people attend reunions more clubs are formed, more events are held, and more people use web tools. This numerical representation of quality is much like that found at Diploma University where the alumni relations officer noted that continual growth in association members is evidence of perceived value in the quality of services provided to them.
Loyalty earns enthusiastic commitment to a relationship that improves lives over the long term (Reichheld, 1996). Providing programs and services for alumni benefits the relationship between former students and their alma maters when connections are based on loyalty. Many strategies are used to keep customers loyal; similarly, these alumni relations officers use several different approaches to ensure the loyalty of alumni. Academic University alumni relations officer explained that the university culture is sustained by the loyalty of its alumni. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer explained that 250-year history of alumni wanting to connect with the university suggests a concept of lifetime engagement and loyalty built into the culture of this university. Diploma University alumni relations officer viewed loyalty as a sense of stewardship. Enthusiastic commitment contributes to the development of the university, just as in business where loyal customers contribute to the health of the company.

Loyalty, a key concept of relationship marketing, seems to breed a strong emotional connection among alumni and with their alma maters. Academic University alumni relations officer spoke of legacy admissions and generations of family members who were Academic University students, citing emotional connection through a long standing family loyalty. Collegiate University alumni relations officer explained that alumni events must deliver the quality of experiences that one would demand at a high level professional conference. The result is an enthusiastic commitment by Collegiate University alumni, emphasized by quality and loyalty, both important relationship marketing concepts. These examples are similar to the concept of loyalty found in the literature for business: the seller’s perception of consumer’s attitude toward the product manifested by rebuying (Hougaard & Bjerre, 2000). Some loyalty examples also appear
to connect alumni emotionally. The emotional connection created through loyalty needs further exploration.

Customer trust and confidence, also an extremely important relationship marketing concept, results when the provider actually delivers on the goods and services (Proctor, 2000). At Baccalaureate University, as the alumni relations officer explained, students reach a point when they realize “I am here, I earned my place, I will be successful, and I will become an alumnus.” This suggests that students have made a connection between their academic efforts and the quality of the education they receive. Trust and confidence are inherent in this connection. Using a different perspective, Collegiate University alumni relations officer explained, “When provided with quality experiences, alumni tend to maintain a connection with their alma mater. They continue to be customers following graduation.” Diploma University alumni relations officer outlined how volunteerism can develop when students place trust and confidence in the university as the provider of excellent opportunities. According to this alumni relations officer, “We should be accountable for the great privilege we have to attend this place.” Academic University alumni relations officer said it best, “What we do is: we back up what we say with what we do.” Academic University provides quality programming, engages alumni early, and services alumni needs. Academic University delivers on what it promises, providing a foundation on which trust and confidence are constructed. These are examples of how relationship marketing concepts can be used in alumni programs to build relationships between the university and its alumni.
Furthermore, specific bonding levels are also important in relationship marketing. The extent to which these institutions apply relationship marketing bonding levels in alumni programs was analyzed using a cross-case comparison.

(RQ3) Utilizing Bonding Levels in Alumni Programs

Given the findings from all four institutions, the researcher compared and contrasted the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs that encourage alumni participation (Table 6). According to Berry (1995), relationship marketing can be practiced on multiple levels depending on the type of bond(s) used to foster customer loyalty. Bonding levels help bind the customer to the marketer. In this study, the researcher sought to identify how bonding levels were used to encourage alumni participation. Each of the four alumni relations officers demonstrated the application of different bonding levels, and did so in different ways.

Table 6  Findings—Relationship Marketing Bonds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>BU</th>
<th>CU</th>
<th>DU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial - rewards, incentives, costs, and benefits</td>
<td>Gifts to students; campus vacation at reasonable price</td>
<td>Do not use monetary inducements to develop connections</td>
<td>Students sent bookmark; alumni brick program</td>
<td>People tend to do things only when it benefits them directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social - ongoing personal interactions and communications</td>
<td>Dorms for reunions, same spirit and traditions of their collegiate years</td>
<td>Cyberspace access to reunions</td>
<td>Alumni register for the reunion to see who else has registered</td>
<td>Alumni attend reunions and service days, a network of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural - empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration</td>
<td>Clubs officers move to board members</td>
<td>Organized around strong class ties, their cohort, and the class</td>
<td>Student review committee empowered with decision-making</td>
<td>“Train world leaders to work as change agents”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At Baccalaureate University and Diploma University, the focus was on social and structural bonds, whereas at Academic University and Collegiate University, the focus initially is on financial bonds, followed by social and structural bonds. An interesting finding identified at each university was two different bonding levels, emotional and intellectual; these do not seem to fit those identified in the relationship marketing literature (Table 8).

**Financial bonds.**

Academic University alumni relations officer focused primarily on financial bonds, including economic factors such as rewards, incentives, costs, and benefits. Academic University ties access of football tickets to donor giving. Academic University and Collegiate University alumni associations are non-dues paying organizations with automatic lifetime members where students are admitted to the organization upon graduation at no cost. Bonding young alumni without costs is an example of applying relationship marketing at the financial level. The Academic University alumni association provides a gift to incoming students and Collegiate University alumni association sends students a bookmark with association information. These are subtle ways of providing rewards and benefits to students in the early days of their academic career, and it also introduces early the idea of becoming alumni. Collegiate University alumni relations officer established an alumni walkway program. For four years students move along the walkway and witness the connection alumni have to the university, a financial bond with the alumnus who contributed the brick. This bond also has the current students wondering about the emotional ties generations of alumni have with their alma mater.
As financial incentives increase, individuals are likely to perceive that the
organization cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa,
1986). For a reasonable price, many families come back to campus for a summer
vacation, an example of a financial bond used at Academic University. Financial bonds
appear of little importance at Baccalaureate University and Diploma University. Diploma
University alumni relations officer felt at first alumni do things only when it benefits
them directly. For Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer, monetary benefits
were mentioned only in the context of the rich history of alumni giving to the institution.
It is not the practice of these two alumni associations to use monetary inducements to
develop connections with its members. These examples support the contention of
Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2008) that financial bonds are considered to be the weakest
type of bonding activity. These two alumni relations officers seem to understand that
while important at the beginning of a relationship, financial bonds are not critical to the
long-term goal of building relationships. Other alumni programs are also provided that
form social bonds to connect alumni with their alma mater.

Social bonds.

Social bonds develop through ongoing personal interaction and communication
(Peltier, Pointer, & Schibrowsky, 2006). Academic University alumni relations officer
meets all new students at the beginning of their first semester on campus. Students must
come to the alumni office in order to get a gift from the alumni association. This visit is
another step in establishing a social bond. Each alumni relations officer also had some
type of alumni reunion, a campus event that brings back special memories while creating
new ones by reconnecting classmates through interactions with each other and with their
alma maters. Academic University uses dorms for reunions, as alumni attend they experience the same spirit and traditions of their collegiate years that also cause an emotional response. A strategy Collegiate University alumni association implements for reunions is using the internet to allow alumni to register for reunions to see who else has registered, an example of using a social bonding tool. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer expressed how reunions are the centerpiece of what this institution does to connect alumni. Even those who cannot attend can gain access through cyberspace and take in the events of the reunion via internet. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer also noted that while reunions are a staple for this university, they were not always meeting alumni expectations. Sophisticated customer focused events were added including faculty lecturers, seminars, and workshops. This development suggests that for some alumni the prospect of social bonding is not enough and that this type of intellectual connection is needed. Diploma University alumni relations officer said alumni attend reunions and service days, but some active alumni were left wanting more. This alumni relations officer encouraged these alumni to take on leadership roles, forming a structural bond between them and their alma mater.

Structural bonds.

The social events of reunions and alumni days also provide leadership opportunities for alumni to bond structurally with the university. In relationship marketing, structural bonds represent the most effective way to secure customer loyalty (Berry, 1995). These four alumni relations officers focused on structural bonds through empowerment, control over decisions, and collaboration. According to the Academic University alumni relations officer, in the 1960s freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior
classes lived separately from each other in their own dorms. Each class eventually moved up from one dorm to another. Freshmen bonded in freshmen halls, creating leadership groups and contributed to their governance of the dorm. They then moved up to sophomore halls as a group, strengthening this cohort. At reunions, the alumni association asks the leadership from these classes to take charge of their cohort. This strategy empowers alumni to make decisions, such as when designing appropriate programs and services to meet their class needs. Academic University has a large club structure that moves alumni from officers to board members, continually providing increasingly important empowerment opportunities. Baccalaureate University and Collegiate University alumni relations officers reiterated the importance of being organized around strong class ties. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer emphasized the depth and breadth of cohort engagement as important to alumni because they feel empowered in the leadership roles created for each class. Collegiate University alumni relations officer spoke about the active club programs nationally and the strength of its leadership in its club officers; through collaboration with club members, decisions are made regarding organized activities for alumni constituents. The prospective student review is another way alumni at Collegiate University are empowered; they interview prospective students and provide feedback about the applicant’s potential as a student.

Empowerment is the foundation for successful alumni service and volunteer programs at Baccalaureate University and Diploma University. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer explained how every class runs their own service programs, which is heavily volunteer-driven, with the focus on the volunteers and not on the staff. Diploma University alumni relations officer expressed the alumni’s “depth and breadth of
engagement” and their interest “to change others lives, to make a difference, and to serve.” Control over decisions and collaboration, key components to structural bonding, are found in Diploma University’s alumni association’s desire to train world leaders to work as change agents to serve others. When alumni were called to service as change agents, structural bonds appeared strong enough to withstand failure; however, another bond seems to emerge as they served others, an emotional bond. Stewardship strengthens the ties that bind alumni to their alma mater at Diploma University. It seems this emotional bond is important in higher education, and not as evident in business when using relationship marketing.

**Emotional bonds.**

When describing emotional bonds, themes emerge: sentiment, passion, obsession, craze, zeal, and fervor. These emotions seem to strengthen for alumni as they connect with their alma maters and may form the basis of this relationship. Each of the four alumni relations officers provided evidence of such emotional bonds. Academic University’s program to connect female alumni provides opportunities for them to emotionally connect with other women graduates who have a bond of shared, unique experiences. Academic University alumni relations officer also told how reunions bring back special memories and create new ones. These programs seem to bind alumni emotionally to their alma maters. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer spoke of the network of over 15,000 volunteers who come back to the university annually to reconnect with the past and reinvest in the future. Volunteers serve as counselors, ambassadors, and cheerleaders as they interview potential students, offer career advice, provide opportunities for community service, and maintain the strong university culture
of giving back and coming back. This volunteerism by alumni is extensive at Baccalaureate University and the connection with, and for, each other is, at least in part, emotional. Diploma University alumni relations officer spoke about alumni bonding with the university through stewardship, the interest in serving others. Alumni volunteer to serve others on behalf of this university, suggesting a connection that is emotionally based.

As an alumnus of Collegiate University, this alumni relations officer passionately expressed the belief that the one stable thing in an alumnus’s life was the university. The belief that Collegiate University will never go away and that the university will always accept alumni back into her arms, represents a lifetime, emotional connection. Diploma University alumni relations officer explicitly expressed, “Alumni maintain emotional connections to their alma mater decades after they have left.” Emotional bonds are unique to higher education and encourage alumni to give back willingly in terms of time, talent, and treasure to their alma maters.

In business, bonds are directional in which the customer gets something and, in return, so does the seller. In this study, the researcher found that customers [alumni] often give back without the expectation of a return beyond a sense of belonging. Diploma University alumni relations officer clearly works to develop relationships with alumni that result in alumni giving money to the institution. The researcher assumes emotion is the motivation for giving back and is the glue in the relationship. While all alumni associations desire the giving of time and talent, gifts of treasure are also a very important goal. Each alumni relations officer looks for alumni to give back treasures. Academic University alumni relations officer believes alumni participation will lead to an increase
in donor count. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer spoke of the chicken or the egg, is it participation that drives giving, or giving that drives participation?

Collegiate University alumni relations officer described that if alumni have a positive view of university there is a “greater proclivity of giving money.” Diploma University alumni relations officer explicitly expressed, “I know this, if we engage alumni intellectually, if we connect with them emotionally, the pocketbook won't be far behind.”

Based on these examples, emotional bonds seem evident in alumni relations. The intellectual bond previously noted is also worth further exploration.

**Intellectual bonds.**

When describing intellectual bonds, themes emerge: understanding, brain power, mental ability, and intelligence. Intellectual bonds seem to strengthen the relationship between alumni and their alma maters. All of the participants provided evidence of intellectual bonds formed between the universities and with alumni. Alumni expect spirit and tradition at reunions; however, Academic University alumni relations officer provided new twists in programming to include seminars featuring faculty and alumni discussing relevant issues. This new design was created to foster intellectual conversations, suggesting that social bonds – the coming together for reunions—has another component. Baccalaureate University alumni relations officer explained that at alumni days, alumni involve themselves by attending lectures and forums, “sampling intellectual fare,” and connecting with like-minded people to enjoy experiences by “building connections through intellectual journeys.” Collegiate University alumni relations officer boasted about their active speaker’s bureau with alumni from all disciplines giving back their talent to the campus and the community at large. The four
alumni relations websites showed alumni magazines that feature academically newsworthy articles. This intellectual bond that develops through seminars, lectures, and news sources is unique to higher education and does not appear in the business literature.

Academic, Baccalaureate, and Diploma Universities offer extensive alumni travel programs with the emphasis on education and intellectual programming. Intellectual opportunities, such as university sponsored travel programs, appear to be another way to intellectually bond alumni to their institutions. The willingness of alumni to pay more to travel with their fellow alumni who have common ties seems different then that seen in business-related relationship building. Diploma University alumni relations officer believes engaging alumni intellectually will find that the open pocketbook will follow. These intellectual ties that bind alumni to their alma maters are unique to the higher education setting and merit further study.

This cross-case synthesis identified four alumni relations officers who apply relationship marketing principles and concepts to strengthen ties between alumni and their alma maters. As the researcher synthesized whether each alumni relations officer applied relationship marketing bonding levels to strengthen relationships between alumni and their alma mater, the researcher found evidence of all three bonding levels: financial, social, and structural. However, there was evidence to suggest that other bonding levels may also be present (Table 7). These additional bonds have tentatively been identified by the researcher as emotional and intellectual bonds.
Table 7  Findings-New Relationship Marketing Bonding Levels and Result

<table>
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<th>AU</th>
<th>BU</th>
<th>CU</th>
<th>DU</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional -</td>
<td>Women connection program</td>
<td>“Over 15,000 volunteers serve as</td>
<td>“CU’s never going to go away;</td>
<td>“To change others lives, to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentiment, passion,</td>
<td>“bond of shared, unique</td>
<td>counselors, ambassadors,</td>
<td>always accept you back into</td>
<td>make a difference, and to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obsession, craze, zeal,</td>
<td>experiences</td>
<td>cheerleaders”</td>
<td>her arms”</td>
<td>serve”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and fervor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual -</td>
<td>Reunions “with a new twist” and travel programs growth</td>
<td>Alumni Days include lectures and forums, “sampling intellectual fare”</td>
<td>Active speaker’s bureau with alumni from all disciplines represented</td>
<td>Educational travel program; connection journeys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding, brain</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>power, mental ability,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and intelligence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Back time,</td>
<td>“We believe participation will lead to a donor count”</td>
<td>“The chicken or the egg; participation or giving”</td>
<td>“Positive view;; a greater proclivity of giving”</td>
<td>“Engage alumni, pocketbook won't be far behind”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talent, and treasure</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

In higher education, these two bonds create and strengthen relationships in unique ways, different than those found in business; however, a further investigation of these findings is warranted.

**Discussion of Findings**

As supported by Stake, (1995) in this study each multiple-site case study consisted of a whole study in which convergent evidence was sought regarding the findings and the conclusions. Within each individual case, the study indicated how and why relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels were used by these alumni relations officers. Each case study presented examples of application of relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels that were similarly applicable in business. Differences became evident when analyzing each case study and when comparing all cases through a cross-case synthesis. Converging lines of inquiry
regarding the use of relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels in alumni relations emerged.

Four case studies were arranged effectively within a multiple-case design resulting in replication logic. This supports Yin’s (2003) argument that for cross-case synthesis replication logic can be applied in a study that involves multiple cases of three or more. The first case study findings regarding additional bonding levels were found replicated in the second, third, and fourth case studies. This replication provides compelling support for similarities and exceptions to an initial set of propositions regarding bonding levels associated with alumni participation in higher education.

Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) support using a word table (Table 8) to display the data to draw cross-case conclusions, assertions, or findings. When the theoretical framework of relationship marketing was applied to alumni programs and services provided by alumni relations officers, some findings/assertions resulted that differ from those found in business. These findings illustrate the cross-case conclusions drawn after applying the theoretical framework of relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels to selected alumni programs.

What appeared in each multiple-site case study were findings regarding different relationship marketing bonding levels associated with alumni participation. The data supports a credible argument that applying relationship marketing principles and concepts are important to alumni participation in higher education. The data also supports a strong and plausible argument that applying relationship marketing in the form of financial, social, and structural bonds are important to alumni participation in higher education.
### Table 8  Cross-case Synthesis and Assertions

**Topical Question (phenomenon):** How might colleges and universities build relationships to influence alumni to participate in supporting the growth and advancement of their alma mater?

**Foreshadowing Problem Statement:** Colleges and universities face challenges in identifying and nurturing revenue streams for their schools. Establishing relationships between alumni and alma mater has the potential to become a vital revenue stream. According to CAE-VSE, 2007, alumni participation rates at high intensive research institutions range from 0-46%.

**Theoretical Framework:** Relationship marketing concerns attracting, maintaining, and in multi-service organizations, enhancing customer relationships (Berry, 1983, p. 25).

**RQ1 Research Question (evolved issue pursued):** In what ways are relationship marketing principles used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters?

**Finding/Assertion:** Four alumni relations officers applied relationship marketing principles to strengthen ties: (a) early customer acquisition; (b) meeting the customer's need first; (c) one-to-one marketing; and (d) providing services designed to satisfy and retain the customer's interest. Collegiate University alumni relations officer did not historically care about early acquisition but is beginning such initiative now. Diploma University alumni relations officer supports the notion that alumnus need is as important as university needs.

**RQ2 Research Question (evolved issue pursued):** In what ways are relationship marketing concepts used in selected alumni programs to build relationships with alumni?

**Finding/Assertion:** Four alumni relations officers applied these four relationship marketing concepts to building relationships: (a) quality of service; (b) value; (c) loyalty and commitment; and (d) trust. Alumni perceive value in emotional and intellectual connections. Diploma University alumni relations officer emphasizes the belief that loyalty and commitment is a two way street between the alumni and their alma mater.

**RQ3 Research Question (evolved issue pursued):** In what ways do the uses of bonding levels in alumni programs encourage alumni participation?

**Finding/Assertion:** As a contribution to alumni participation, four alumni relations officers applied three bonds associated with relationship marketing: (a) financial level; (b) social level; and (c) structural level. Alumni relations officers at Academic and Collegiate Universities place a high level of importance on financial bonds, whereas alumni relations officers at Collegiate and Diploma Universities skipped over financial bonds and emphasize social and structural bonds as important.

**Finding/Assertion:** Four alumni relations officers also applied two new bonding levels identified by this researcher as emotional and intellectual bond. These two bonds appear unique to the context of higher education and differ from that found in business. Emotion bonds also motivate alumni to give back and all alumni relations officers supported this notion.
These three bonds alone are not the driving force in building relationships with alumni and their alma maters. Emotional and intellectual bonds also appear critically important. These findings are worth suggesting implications for alumni relations officers at colleges and universities.

**Implications**

This research implies that alumni relations officers should consider implementing relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels in alumni programs and services. This business concept is worthy of consideration and application, and is possibly a way to reinvent doing business in alumni relations. The findings of this study go beyond what is normally found in business, where customers develop bonds with retailers, but not with other customers. In business, nor do customers give back to the retailer without gaining something in return. Conversely, in higher education alumni bond with each other and give back to their alma maters based on bonds formulated. In higher education, alumni appear to create emotional bonds with their alma maters and with each other, through networking, mentoring, and sharing of memories. In higher education, alumni also connect intellectually with their alma mater and each other when attending educational conferences, seminars and workshops; through exploration and travel trips; and when participating in faculty lectures and colloquiums. When using relationship marketing in business, it does not appear retailers use emotional or intellectual bonds to build relationships with or among their customers.

Findings from this study should be useful to alumni relations officers as they design programs and services for their alumni. As alumni relations officers work to keep alumni satisfied, it may prove less costly and more efficient for colleges and universities
to concentrate on keeping students satisfied from the onset of matriculation, so as not to lose customers early in the process. As programs and services are being planned and before implementation, alumni relations officers would be well served to use a checklist format to determine whether programs and services foster relationship building at the financial, social, and structural bonding levels and, specifically, at the emotional and intellectual bonding levels. The findings of this study indicate relationships are strengthened by strong passion, identity, and the sense of belonging alumni have with their alma maters and with each other; and when alumni engage in educational experiences with fellow alumni and with their alma maters. Alumni relations officers should create programs and services that inspire sentiment, instill passion, encourage zeal, as well as infuse fervor; and those that generate understanding, trigger brain power, activate mental ability, and challenge intelligence, to foster emotional and intellectual bonds with their alumni. The researcher found that emotional bonds also encourage alumni to give back time, talent, and treasure to their alma maters. This finding should encourage alumni relations officers and advancement officers to share ideas and compare practices so that colleges and universities benefit financially.

Using the theoretical framework of relationship marketing, this study assists in the development of comprehensive and consistent alumni programs and services that encourage alumni to participate at the financial, social, structural, emotional, and intellectual levels; ultimately, benefiting the growth and advancement of alma maters. Further research is recommended regarding relationship marketing and its impact on strengthening ties between alumni and their alma maters.
Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher recommends the following areas for further research, based on the cross-case synthesis, discussion of findings, and implications:

1. It is worth studying other institutions to determine whether those alumni relations officers apply the theoretical framework of relationship marketing in alumni programs and services to strengthen relationships between alumni and their alma maters, since this sample of universities was not representative of other institutions, such as public research universities.

2. It may be worthwhile applying an explanatory or descriptive investigation to the same multiple-site case study because this study was exploratory and it did not provide an explanation or a detailed description of the use of relationship marketing in alumni relations.

3. Employing a quantitative method of study, using a survey tool, is worth considering because this study employed a qualitative method, using interviews as the tool. This study was challenging because it required the researcher to depend on the respondent’s answers to the questions without inadvertently leading the participant to the theoretical framework.

4. Repeating this study using the case study protocol with other colleges and universities might strengthen the findings for this study, narrowing the gap in the literature about alumni relations applying relationship marketing.
5. Where emotional and intellectual bonds appear among financial, social, and structural bonds was not determined in this study and needs further exploration, since in relationship marketing bonds are hierarchical.

6. Other implications that emotional and intellectual bonding levels have on strengthening ties between alumni and their alma maters also needs further research.

This study provided an exploration in determining if, and in what ways, relationship marketing principles, concepts, and bonding levels were used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma maters. This study contributes to the alumni relations literature by offering suggestions and identifying implications for use of this business theoretical framework when designing programs to encourage alumni participation.

Summary

The researcher synthesized the four multiple-site case studies at select universities by comparing the data from each site. The research questions guiding this study were addressed by exploring the cases through the lens of the theoretical framework of relationship marketing. In order for an institution of higher education to achieve its goal of attaining excellence, institutional advancement teams must secure private funding. This effort can be accomplished with the help of alumni relations as the university builds relationships with prospective students who eventually become alumni. The researcher believes if college and university personnel treat their students, and future alumni, as retail store employees treat their best customers, and eventual consumers, that
partnerships will emerge, resulting in improved friend-raising and fund raising opportunities for their institution, a focus of this exploratory study.

By treating prospective students as valued customers before students first arrive on campus until their graduation and well beyond, this business application of relationship marketing in a higher education setting of alumni relations helps strengthen the ties that bind the alumni to their alma maters. Intended to provide alumni relations officers with a theoretical framework of relationship marketing, this study assists in the development of comprehensive and consistent alumni programs and services encouraging alumni to participate at the financial, social, structural, emotional, and intellectual levels; ultimately, benefiting the growth and advancement of their alma maters.
APPENDIX A

LIST OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Higher Education Institutions: Intensive Private Research Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Alumni: Total $</th>
<th>Alumni: Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>$284,588,291</td>
<td>9 – 28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell University</td>
<td>$210,121,965</td>
<td>4 – 41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>$192,421,017</td>
<td>6 – 31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>$188,156,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>$149,230,162</td>
<td>5 – 45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton University</td>
<td>$136,138,753</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia University</td>
<td>$138,164,478</td>
<td>3 – 45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Penn</td>
<td>$115,283,135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Notre Dame</td>
<td>$111,905,227</td>
<td>1 – 46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Chicago</td>
<td>$101,873,548</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts Institute/Technology</td>
<td>$96,439,226</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
<td>$83,893,361</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dartmouth College</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 – 46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown University</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 – 34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNY-College of Env. Sci.-Forestry</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 – 31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 – 31.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pilot Study:

University of California, Irvine (CAE-VSE, 2007)
APPENDIX B

CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

Pilot Study

Week 1  The researcher gained access to the pilot case study participant purposely
selected by the researcher by

  Placing a phone call, and
  Sharing information about the dissertation,
  Explaining the researcher’s study,
  Discussing the purpose of the study,
  Explaining the time required of the participant,
  Outlining how anonymity will be retained for the officer and the school,
  Detailing the research methodology,
  Scheduling the phone call for interview purposes, and
  Obtaining a preliminary acceptance to participate

Week 2  Phone interview questions

  Planned to last no more than 45 minutes,
  Tape recorded for accuracy and obtained a verbal informed consent to participate,
  Allowed for flexibility should the interviewee’s responses dictate

Multiple-site Case Study

Week 1  The researcher’s co-worker, an athletic development officer, helped to
gain access to potential participants purposely selected by the researcher by

  Placing a phone call, and
  Explaining the researcher’s study, and
  Obtaining a preliminary acceptance to participate

Week 2  The researcher waited until hearing back from the co-worker before the
researcher contacts the interested alumni relations officer by

  Placing a phone call, and
  Sharing information about the dissertation,
  Discussing the purpose of the study,
Explaining the time required of the participant, 
Outlining how anonymity will be retained for the officer and the school, 
Detailing the research methodology, 
Setting the agreed date scheduled for the phone call for interview purposes 
Sending a follow-up with a confirmation e-mail, and 
Reiterating the above information, and 
Providing an informed consent form for the study 

Week 3 Phone interview questions 

Planned to last no more than 45 minutes, 
Tape recorded for accuracy and obtained a verbal informed consent to participate, 
Allowed for flexibility should the interviewee’s responses dictate 

Week 4, 5 Document retrieval (Appendix E) and review: 

Week 6, 7 Transcribe interviews 

Week 8 to 10 Analyze data 

   Indexing, 
   Charting, and 
   Mapping 
   Follow up questions to interviewees as needed 

Week 11 to 13 Interpretation of data 

   Triangulation of data with interviewees 

Week 14 to 16 Contingency timeframe
Dear Potential Study Participant,

We are contacting you about a research study exploring relationship (RM) principles and alumni participation. This study will attempt to examine whether RM principles, as adapted from the corporate world and modeled in a buyer-seller bonding relationship, apply in alumni giving. As the alumni relations officer at your institution, if you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer several interview questions and provide various supporting documents relevant to the study.

For the purpose of this study, your participation will help us to determine in what ways principles of RM are used to strengthen the ties between alumni and their alma mater. The study will include one 30 to 45 minute interview. Responses from your interview will be recorded so that readers cannot trace these responses to any specific participant or institution. All communication will be confidential and no information from this study will be collected that identifies you or your university.

If you are interested in learning more about this study or have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa A. Kelleher via e-mail at 6kelleher@cox.net or via phone at 702-596-1233. Your inquiry does not obligate you to this study, it only indicates your interest in learning more about this study, as you decide to participate or not.

In accordance with the UNLV Institutional Review Board, should you decide to participate, the attached informed consent form must be reviewed, and your verbal consent recorded, demonstrating your acceptance to participate in this study. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa A. Kelleher, Co-Principal Investigator
702-596-1233 6kelleher@cox.net

Robert Ackerman, Ed.D.
Professor and Co-Principal Investigator
702-895-2740 bob.ackerman@unlv.edu

Attachment: Informed Consent Document
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Alumni Participation: An Investigation Using Relationship Marketing Principles

INVESTIGATOR(S): Robert Ackerman, Ed.D., and Lisa Kelleher

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Robert Ackerman (702) 895-2740; Lisa Kelleher (702) 596-1233

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine in what ways principles of relationship marketing (RM) are used to strengthen the ties between the alumni and the university. Researchers have studied the existence of RM principles in the corporate world and within some areas of higher education, but no single study has explored the application from an alumni participation perspective.

Participants
You are asked to participate in this study because you are a senior alumni relations officer employed at least three years at a Carnegie classification of high intensive private research institution and are a participant in the 2007 CAE-VSE, Voluntary Support for Education Survey, ranking in the top 10 in Alumni Participation Rate Percentage.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Participate in one tape-recorded phone interview about your alumni participation programs. The interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time determined between the researcher and the participant and confirmed via e-mail. You will also be asked to provide supporting documents to be studied in conjunction with the study. The document collection and distribution should require no more than 1 ½ to 2 hours of your time commitment.

Benefits of Participation
There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. We hope to learn that this research may help one better understand the importance of how to build relationships with alumni. The study findings may be used to enhance development, translating into greater growth and stature for your university, and breaking new ground in institutional advancement. This research may benefit other alumni relations officers by contributing to limited knowledge regarding RM principles’ application in a higher education setting.
**Risks of Participation**
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks of discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected that are no greater than those encountered in everyday life, deeming this study of minimal risk.

**Cost/Compensation**
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take no more than 3 hours of your time (i.e. 30-45 minutes for the phone interview, 1 ½ - 2 hrs. to gather documents and send via mail, and a follow-up phone call to member check). You will not be compensated for your time.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Robert Ackerman at 702-895-2748. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office for Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Confidentiality**
All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After storage time the information gathered will be shredded and discarded appropriately.

**Participant Consent:**
The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects AND involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context, as all correspondence will be completed by phone or via email. The informed consent will be read during the initial call to seek participation of the participant. The informed consent will be sent as an attachment to the follow-up email confirming participation. During the time of the scheduled phone interview, prior to commencing the interview, the researcher will tape record the verbal response by the participant acknowledging that the participant is at least 18 years of age, has read the above information, has received the informed consent for review, and agrees to participate in this study. Once the informed consent process is completed the phone interview will begin.
## APPENDIX E

### MULTIPLE-SITE CASE STUDY DATABASE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document collection/description</th>
<th>Academic University</th>
<th>Baccalaureate University</th>
<th>Collegiate University</th>
<th>Diploma University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation definition</td>
<td>Cultivation of alumni &quot;we are old friend builders&quot;</td>
<td>Engaging with university and engaging alumni WITH alumni</td>
<td>Positive connection created by the university with an alumnus</td>
<td>The sharing and the giving of time, talent, treasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission statement</td>
<td>To meet the needs of the alumni</td>
<td>To engage alumni in the ongoing life of the university</td>
<td>To keep alumni engaged with the university and with each other</td>
<td>To help foster greater ties between alumni and the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs and services</td>
<td>&quot;Alumni don't interrupt our business, they are our business&quot;</td>
<td>To support alumni initiatives that promotes university goals</td>
<td>To help alumni maintain a lifelong connection</td>
<td>To serve interests of the University and the alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Endowment for Excellence in Alumni Programming&quot;</td>
<td>Alumni Education - connect with alumni who might not engage</td>
<td>Learning - back to class with faculty to reconnect intellectually</td>
<td>Educational Programs to connect alumni intellectually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Innovative Programs&quot;</td>
<td>Public Service Initiatives - helping students and the community</td>
<td>Volunteer and Give - service to university and society</td>
<td>University Day of Service - making a difference where they live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st interactive continuing education seminars via satellite</td>
<td>Online courses - to plug into the intellectual side of campus life</td>
<td>Alumni College Advising Program</td>
<td>Open Courses - online education initiative for interested alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Service Programs and Events - service leadership</td>
<td>Awards Programs - to recognize alumni commitment</td>
<td>Recognition Opportunities - to acknowledge great alumni work</td>
<td>Day of Service - lead as volunteers to better serve university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service Learning Programs - students helping in communities</td>
<td>Careers Network - sharing opportunities</td>
<td>Career Navigator - job connections with like-minded</td>
<td>Career Network - helping alumni in the business world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictitious University Name</th>
<th>Academic University</th>
<th>Baccalaureate University</th>
<th>Collegiate University</th>
<th>Diploma University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Development - seminars and webinars</td>
<td>Affiliated Groups - connections with shared interests</td>
<td>SIG's - multicultural programs</td>
<td>SIG's - affinity groups for like-minded alumni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Seminars - academic and professional programs</td>
<td>Regional and Class Affairs - locale and cohort connections</td>
<td>Classes and Clubs - affinity opportunities</td>
<td>Clubs/Associations - engaging in community/business development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn Alumni Shared Interest Groups (SIG) - affinity groups</td>
<td>Alumni Day - a glimpse of campus life for alumni</td>
<td>Mentoring Group - to help navigate transition from campus to life</td>
<td>Celebration Weekend - engage/connect alumni across generations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Connect- educational, spiritual, social and prof.dev.</td>
<td>Conferences bringing alumni together</td>
<td>Leadership Conferences -</td>
<td>Life-long learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel Discussions of relevant issues of our time</td>
<td>Travel - connect through intellectual programs; a common bond</td>
<td>Travel -</td>
<td>Educational Travel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR1 Lecture Series - opportunities for intellectual renewal</td>
<td>Football weekends - connecting while supporting athletics</td>
<td>Brick Walkway- to celebrate lifelong connection to the university</td>
<td>Reunions - living the past and enjoying the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Program - educational travel opportunities with alumni</td>
<td>Reunions - opportunity to reconnect</td>
<td>Reunions - reconnecting with classmate from the past</td>
<td>Service Corps - enabling volunteers to make a difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni Sports Weekend - opportunity to connect over sports</td>
<td>Volunteer Program</td>
<td>Schools Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reunion and Seminar Series - tradition with a new twist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 300 alumni clubs, nationally and internationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measurement/evaluation tools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online alumni satisfaction survey</th>
<th>Metric used to establish patterns of alumni engagement</th>
<th>Metrics - simple data points</th>
<th>Evaluation surveys and varying performance measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Number of alumni**

| above 120000 | above 80000 | above 70000 | above 140000 |

**Fictitious University Name**

| Academic University | Baccalaureate University | Collegiate University | Diploma University |

**2007 CAE VSE % Rate**

| above 40% | above 40% | above 30% | above 30% |

**Magazines**

| Alumni Association Newsletter - communication connection piece | Alumni Magazine - Extensive connection piece | Alumni Voices - communication tool for alumni | Alumni Magazine - connection piece for alumni |

**Brochures**

<p>| All about AU - learn about academics, athletics, leadership/service | Alumni Welcome - reasons to stay connected | E-Newsletter - keeping alumni connected in cyberspace | Career Network Online Brochure - help alumni in the business world |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate Traditions</td>
<td>annual reunion 4 day schedule</td>
<td>Reunions Detail - schedule of events for engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Catalog</td>
<td>educational component not offered commercially</td>
<td>Alumni Weekly - articles featuring alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Service Learning Program</td>
<td>discussion of social concerns</td>
<td>Alumni Day - engaging academic content and schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>Annual Report on communities, academics, service/communication</td>
<td>Committee Reports - minutes outlining program activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bylaws</td>
<td>Articles and Bylaws - structure and purpose</td>
<td>Constitution and Bylaws - structure and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>iModules - web-based connections through online communities</td>
<td>Regional Assoc Volunteer Handbook - need to know steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer Leader Handbook - do's and don't of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alumni Directory - reconnect and network with other alumni</td>
<td>Funding Guide for academic work and service initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Letter from the AA President - goals, structure and getting involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint Statement on lifetime engagement by alumni with university AND each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>completed</td>
<td>Completed</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


http://www.case.org/Content/AboutCASE/Display.cfm?CONTAINERID=142&CONTENTITEMID=2394&CRUMB=3

http://www.case.org/Content/AboutCASE/Display.cfm?CONTAINERID=40&CONTENTITEMID=2573&NAVID=54


VITA

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Lisa Ann Kelleher

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  Master of Science, Health and Physical Education, 1980
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  Omicron Delta Kappa-Miami University
  Dean’s List-Miami University
  Graduate Assistantship-University of Arizona
  Honorable Mention, GPSA Research Forum-UNLV

Dissertation Title: Alumni Participation: An Investigation Using Relationship Marketing Principles

Dissertation Examination Committee:
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  Committee Member, Vicki Rosser, Ph.D.
  Committee Member, Edith Rusch, Ph.D.
  Committee Member, John Schibrowsky, Ph.D.