



# Brevard College: Advancement Services in the Wake of an Institutional Transition

Erin C. Perez

Anna K. Thomas

Quinton P. Walker

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# Dedication

Each of us remembers the day we received the slender letter postmarked from Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. It was clearly a rejection letter, given its simplicity; the oversized package that accompanied a college acceptance was what each of us had hoped for.

Or at least we thought.

Opening the envelope, however, revealed that the three of us, in three very different places in our lives, were being offered a spot in the Ed.D. Program at Vanderbilt University. That letter would bring us together, granting us membership into a community of scholars and practitioners dedicated to better educating the world.

We thank this institution for relentlessly pursuing knowledge and wisdom about education. We thank our world-class faculty, too many to name, who have imparted lessons about living, leading, and loving the work we have each been called to do. We thank our colleagues for making this the vibrant intellectual community we each hoped it would be. It has been so much more.

We don't think any of us really knew what we were agreeing to three years ago. Had we known, we may not have opened the letter. Thankfully we did. And here we are.

To Susan, Cheri, Rebecca and the rest of the Brevard College Executive team – our sincerest thanks for your hospitality, support, and partnership throughout our time together. We hope you find our work to help you get a bit closer to achieving your inspired mission.

For our families, friends, and loved ones who stood by us, cheered us on, and picked up the slack when we let things slide – this is for you.

-Erin, Anna, and Quinton

# About the Authors

## **Erin C. Perez**

Erin Perez currently serves as a Lecturer in the Music Education department at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University. She teaches Music Philosophy and other pedagogical courses to prepare undergraduate and first-year graduate students to become music educators. She also serves as an Associate Conductor where she conducts the Blair Wind Symphony and various chamber ensembles. Prior to, she served as a junior-high band director for four years at Forest Meadow Junior High in Richardson Independent School District in Dallas, Texas. Erin received her Master's from Peabody College in 2007 and her bachelor's from the Blair School of Music in 2006 playing the clarinet. She currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee with her husband where they enjoy the pleasures of being first-time parents to their beloved 6-month-old son. In addition to ogling over baby giggles, she enjoys the outdoors with her Weimaraner dog, traveling, and going to the movies.

## **Anna K. Thomas**

Anna Thomas currently serves as the Director of Parents & Family Programs in the department of Development and Alumni Relations at Vanderbilt University. She has worked with parents of undergraduate students for five years. Anna has a background in university housing, greek life, student conduct, and new student orientation. In her current role, she oversees a parent board, coordinates communication between and Vanderbilt University and the parents of current students, and oversees the planning for Family Weekend. She is an active member of the Vanderbilt University Staff Advisory Council, having served as President during the 2012-2013 year. Her research/career interests include strategic planning, student engagement, gender issues, and program evaluation. Anna received a master's degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College in 2008 and a bachelor's degree from Emory University in 2005. She lives in Nashville with her spouse and their 15-month-old daughter. In her spare time, Anna enjoys yoga, cooking, and photography.

## **Quinton P. Walker**

Quinton Walker currently serves as the Dean of Global Studies at Holy Innocents' Episcopal School in Atlanta, Georgia. Previously, he worked as a management consultant with a London-based consultancy. He has a background in curriculum development, instructional practices, and academic leadership. In his current role, he directs the Program for Global Citizenship at Holy Innocents', a program that develops leadership skills, intercultural competence, and a justice orientation in its students. He also serves on the school's admissions committee. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Duke University in 2004. In 2005, Quinton finished his Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration from the University of Michigan. In the spare time he will soon have, he enjoys cooking, trying Atlanta's newest restaurants, and volleyball.

# Executive Summary

## Higher Education is Mired in Change

Higher education is mired in a period of change; colleges and universities are becoming increasingly adept at adapting to those changes. As they grow more agile as institutions, they too become more complicated. Nowhere has the pressure to “adapt to survive” been more present than at small liberal arts colleges. Facing questions of relevance, cost escalation, and mission creep, these institutions, often with 1,000 students or less, are searching for ways to remain competitive in today’s marketplace.

Once a two-year junior college, Brevard College made the decision to shift its academic mission in 1995, partially as a response to the shifting markets (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication, July 8, 2013). The institution elevated its curricular offerings in preparation for awarding four-year degrees. Exploring one of the key implications -- a segmented alumni population by virtue of the transition – inspired this work.

In July 2013, Brevard College (“Brevard” or “The College”) approached Vanderbilt University to assist in gaining a better understanding of the institutional remnants of the transition. Through a series of conversations with the leadership team at Brevard, we arrived at the following sets of questions: are there differences in the nature of interactions between two-year alumni and four-year alumni from a development standpoint? Given the nature of the small college tradition, what role do friends and the local community play in the institution’s success? And by extension, are other institutions that share Brevard College’s transition saga concerned with the stewardship of different subsets of alumni?

### Project Questions

**Question I:** What personal characteristics contribute to low levels of alumni giving?

**Question II:** What is the perception of Brevard College among alumni and friends of the institution?

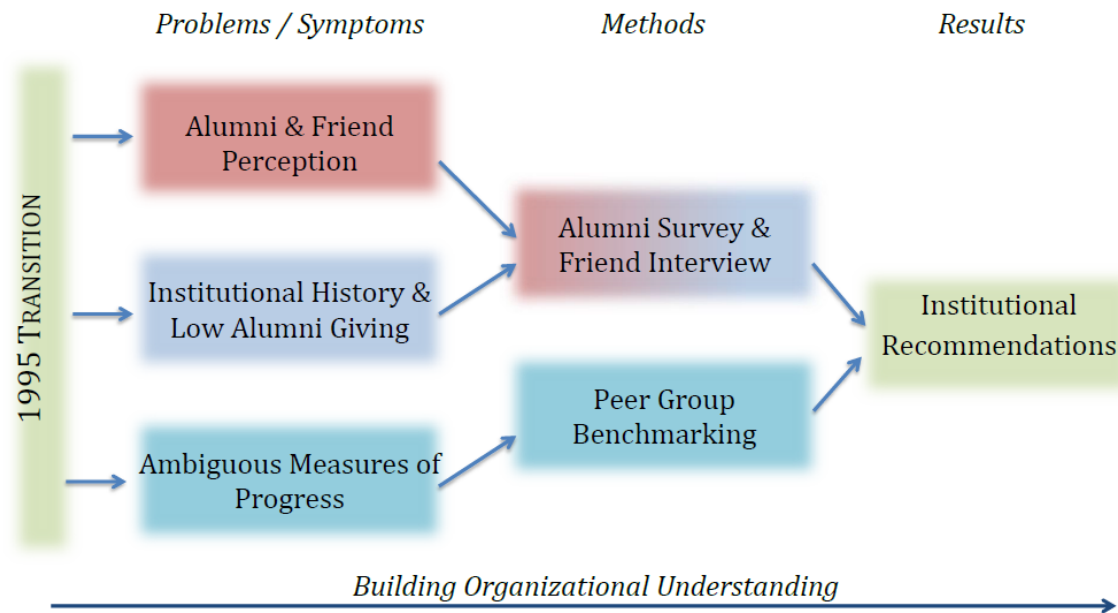
**Question III:** How does Brevard College compare to benchmarks of similar liberal arts institutions that have successfully transitioned from a 2-year to 4-year college?

The figure at the conclusion of this section should serve as a model of inquiry for the reader. Essentially, the quantitative methods employed help us understand giving trends within the Brevard College alumni population. The qualitative portion of the projects attempts to illuminate why friends give and how they have responded to the shift in institutional mission. Finally, we conducted a benchmarking study of similarly-situated institutions who share a key component of Brevard’s institutional saga – mission transformation that

results in a segmented alumni body. This work, more practical in nature, is designed to help Brevard with operational best practices for the future.

Recognizing the challenges with the extant literature in the development arena, we designed our work to be both internally responsive to Brevard College's needs and externally aimed at capturing best practices for small college advancement. In the end, Brevard College, under its new leadership is poised for a bright future. This work is dedicated to their continued understanding of how to better serve and steward its alumni base and community of friends.

**Figure 1: Model of Inquiry**



# Introduction to the Project

## Institutional Sketch

From its Methodist roots in the early 1850s to the present, Brevard College has sought to, in accordance with its institutional mission, educate the citizens of Western North Carolina in the ways of making a life, not simply a living. Situated in Brevard, a rural mountain town on the Eastern border of the Appalachian Mountains, this Methodist-affiliated institution's liberal arts focus distinguishes it from other geographically proximal institutions. Given the scope of our project, this is worth noting early and often. The city of Brevard and Brevard College are inextricably linked, both then and now, and acknowledging this relationship is pivotal to the success of our project.

## Institutional Mission

Brevard College, from its inception, has experienced a shift in its institutional mission. Prior to 1995, Brevard was an associate-degree granting institution, content with acting as a conduit between motivated high school students and larger four-year institutions. However, with the advent of the college's first bachelor's degree program in 1995, the school's focus shifted (Brevard College Catalog, 1995-1997). No longer acting as an intermediary, Brevard endeavored to inculcate a belief in four-year college graduates that life was oriented around both reflection and action (BC News Bureau, 1994). That two-year to four-year transition, complete with the cultural, organizational, and operational implications, is still being fully understood today. In fact, beginning in 2013, the institution adopted a new mission statement: "Brevard College is committed to an experiential liberal arts education that encourages personal growth and inspires artistic, intellectual, and social action" (Brevard College: About Us, 2013). Per the Vice President of Institutional Advancement, this mission orients Brevard's actions when considering its constituents.

## Who Brevard Serves

In total, Brevard serves almost 660 students in nearly twenty academic programs. For the Class of 2016, 1,346 students applied and 56 percent of the students were admitted. Of note, however, is the college's low yield; 25 percent of

### Brevard College

#### Established

1853

#### Enrollment

658

Male: 57%

Female: 43%

Non North Carolina: 47%

#### Affiliations

United Methodist

NCAA Division II

#### Tuition

\$32,760

#### Students on Financial Aid

94%

#### Endowment

\$19.98 Million (FY 2012)

#### Regional Economic Impact

\$9 Million annually

#### Institutional Type

4-year comprehensive

liberal arts college

#### Accreditation

Southern Association of

Colleges and Schools

#### Leadership

Dr. David Joyce



admitted students enrolled as freshmen. Fifty-three percent of the student enrollment is composed of North Carolina residents; a strong majority of the remaining students matriculate from states bordering North Carolina. Tuition is approximately \$32,000 a year, and 70.3 percent of students receive need-based aid. Brevard's freshman retention rate is 59.5 percent, and the six-year graduation rate is 32 percent.

Almost 80 percent of students elect one of five majors: (1) Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Studies, (2) Interdisciplinary Studies, (3) Business and Commerce, (4) Visual and Performing Arts, and (5) Psychology. According to the Dean of Admissions at Brevard College, Interdisciplinary Studies acts as a “catch-all” for students who want to pursue curriculum beyond the standard academic program. As discussed above, distinctiveness matters for the admissions process at the college. An underlying question that we will ask, the same one that students ask themselves during the admissions process, is what sets Brevard College apart from its peers? See inset for an institutional sketch of Brevard College.

### **What Brevard Develops in Its Students**

The institution's website reveals that a student will be expected to sharpen the connection between their mind, body, and spirit while in residence at Brevard. In fact, the school demands it. “You will be expected to house your healthy mind in an equally health body. And you will be expected to dig deep inside of yourself to determine who you really are, what you believe, and what you stand for...You will stretch your abilities to think critically” (Brevard College Students, 2013). A refrain common too much of the institutional literature is contemplation—Brevard College fosters in its students a habit of introspection. In essence, the school takes seriously its charge to deliver a well-rounded, liberal arts experience to all of its students, the Appalachian backdrop serving as an ideal setting for a rich experience.

### **Academic Program**

The faculty of Brevard College is charged with administering course offerings in twenty majors, ranging from English to Wilderness Leadership and Experiential Education. Though not as robust of a selection as its larger peers (competitors), the academic program is augmented by a series of pre-professional programs and a host of teacher licensure options. Recognizing its commitment to the local Transylvania County community, Brevard faculty avail their courses to the public for a nominal fee. Each semester, community members may elect to audit select courses, some of local interest while others are of more academic pursuits. Perhaps most notable, however, is the institutional recognition for its first-year-educational experience. Frequently highlighted by U.S. News and World Report for its first year seminars, the institution prides itself on orienting students to the norms and expectations of the Brevard College student—contemplation, engagement, and academic maturation.

### **Strategic Focus**

In 2008, the institution embarked upon a five-year strategic planning process with six commitments: (1) encourage meaningful service, (2) promote student engagement, (3) model environmental stewardship, (4) strengthen financial resources, (5) expand employee support, and (6) enhance campus infrastructure. Each of those commitments is accompanied by three initiatives that reflect Brevard's commitment to those themes. Until the 2009-2010 academic year, annual update reports were published on the institution's website. However, in the years since 2010, no reports have been shared publicly. The following section

illustrates the backstory behind the transition. It is possible the conflicting truths as to why the transition occurred and how it was implemented created certain institutional challenges Brevard College undergoes today.

### **Institutional Transition**

Depending upon whom one asks or where one researches, the transition story for Brevard College has some variation. All accounts of the story agree that 1995 marked the year of transition for the college from a two-year junior college to a four-year baccalaureate-granting institution. Examining official college documents, press releases, accreditation materials, and news stories reveals a transition inspired by progress, optimism, and consensus. Speaking with present-day administrators along with faculty members who witnessed the college's transition suggests a hastily-planned, power-motivated period of change for Brevard College.

As is most often the case, both versions are “true,” with the truth likely resting between the documentation of the past and the recollections of the present. Centering on President Bertrand's 1994 “The Case for Instituting Baccalaureate Programs in Music and Art,” the following section discusses the contrasting transition stories—the contrasting stories' consequences still shaping institutional operations today.

### **Long on the Mind of the Institution**

Prior to 1995, a series of conversations suggested that the College had long considered offering a bachelor's degree. Once in 1984 and again in 1986, plans were drafted to elevate the college's academic offerings. In fact, the Board of Trustees dropped the word “junior” from the college's charter in 1984. Yet, Brevard College remained a junior college for a decade longer.

There is some discrepancy as to why the college failed to transition during the 1980s. In a Transylvania Times story written by Brevard College's Director of Public Information, Jock Lauterer, suggests that support for the transition was widespread among faculty, staff, and alumni. He cites the result of a consulting study that concluded “There are too many positive signals to be ignored. The prospects of converting to a four-year school should be pursued (Lauterer, “A Four Year College”, p. 3A). Reviewing Bertrand's 1994 report suggests the institutional climate was less than favorable for a transition during the 1980s: a divided faculty; opposition from alumni; lack of consensus among trustees. On the whole, better to stick with a formula that worked than to become ‘just another mediocre four-year college’” (Bertrand, p. 5, 1994).

### **A Bold Proposal**

Revisiting the exclusion of the word “junior” from the college charter again surfaced in the early 1990's with the arrival of President Tom Bertrand. Long-standing faculty members, current administration, and the college archivist all describe President Bertrand as a highly political figure on campus, eager to elevate the profile of the college in a manner arguably inconsistent with the school's proposed plan for the future. This elevation, in Bertrand's eyes, needed as its focal point a four-year bachelor's degree.

Bertrand's plan was written to avoid becoming that mediocre college. Rather, the plan was written to both solidify and deepen Brevard College's place in the region's educational fabric. This elevation needed as its focal point a four-year bachelor's degree.

Bertrand's plan was written to avoid becoming that mediocre college. Rather, the plan was written to both solidify and deepen Brevard College's place in the region's educational fabric. In his 1994 document to the Trustees, Alumni, and Friends of Brevard College, Bertrand outlined a course of action for Brevard College to add to its curricular offerings a Baccalaureate Degree in music and art.

From the report, three principal reasons can be highlighted that provided the rationale for elevating the institution's degree offerings to the bachelor's level.

- Differentiation from Surrounding Junior Colleges and Community Colleges
- Declining Enrollment Amid Increasing Competition
- Unilateral Support by Trustees, Faculty, Staff, and Administration

Summarily, the collective rationales for the college's transition revolve around Bertrand's assertion that the timing was optimal in the institution's life cycle to strive for distinctiveness. "Today, both the threat and opportunity converge to bring us to another point of decision," Bertrand remarks (1994, p. 3). Later in the report he says, "With boldness and careful planning, we have the opportunity to mature into a truly distinctive four-year college" (1994, p.10).

### **The Transition as told from the Current Brevard College Community**

Today's administrators reflect that the shift was made quickly and without much planning in an effort to both increase market appeal and student enrollment, indicators vital to ensuring the institution's fiscal health. Since the 1995 transition, however, Brevard College has struggled to compete with other four-year colleges. Administrators feel they have lost the "niche" market they held as a two-year college. Brevard was previously a "feeder" school to four-year colleges, with whom they now compete with for the same students.

Brevard College boasted unique music, arts, and wilderness education programs. This uniqueness is not without its costs. As the college's resources dwindled, competitor institutions replicated these programs, taking them to other schools where the funds to support them were more readily available. Administrators note that while Brevard was once a "shabby chic" college in the mountains, it is now one of many "shabby chic" mountain colleges in North Carolina. As a result, Brevard has struggled to find its position in the higher education marketplace. Distinctiveness is elusive. More, administrators report uncertainty about how alumni view the college. They hypothesize that some classes would report a "transactional" college experience while others might report a "transformational" experience.

### **The Transition Today**

On the brink of the twentieth anniversary of the institution's transition from a two to four year college, the impacts of the transition linger. No matter the version of the institutional story one subscribes to, the underlying tension, both then and now, rests around how Brevard College interacts with alumni who graduated from the institution's two-year program versus those who graduated with a four-year degree.

At its core, the transition's key consequence rests at the intersection between tuition-dependency and levels of giving; Brevard College's

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stated goal for enrollment is 1,000 students. Presently, the institution forecasts that its enrollment goal should be met within the next seven to ten years. Until that tuition is captured and made available for the college's growth, how does the institution steward alumni who graduated from a college with two different missions and purposes? The distinctiveness for which Brevard College strives is paramount, as two-year alumni are faced with decisions about how to spend their philanthropic dollars. Do those alumni contribute to the four-year college that provided them with a two-year education? Alternatively, do these alumni spend their dollars elsewhere, compromising the development opportunities for Brevard College at present?

## Exploration of the Problem

As recounted in the previous section, bucolic Brevard College still grapples with its institutional transition nearly two decades later. This struggle gave rise to our inquiry – how has Brevard College arrived in its current situation? In order to provide background for our project questions, this section looks at the antecedents to the current problems that Brevard College has presented. Given the tuition dependence of small colleges like Brevard, we first look at a financial overview of the college with specific data from their advancement office in order to provide an appropriate context for Brevard College challenges. Then, we outline the challenges explicitly put forth by the college in its statement of the problem, a statement that reflects institutional concerns and challenges as it readies itself for a period of growth. Finally, we characterize the discussions between Brevard College and our Vanderbilt project team that helped us arrive at a shared understanding of the project. This understanding results in the study's three major project questions.

### Financial/Advancement Overview and Peer Comparison

Brevard compiled key financial benchmarking data in July of 2013 from a group of schools they consider to be peers (Bethany College, Mars Hill College, LaGrange College, Catawba College, and Davis & Elkins College) and a group they consider to be aspirants (Bridgewater College, Emory & Henry College, Knox College, Lenoir-Rhyne University, and Maryville College). See Table 1 for an overview of the peer comparisons to Brevard College.

**Table 1: Financial Benchmarks**

|                                | <b>Brevard College</b> | <b>Peer Group</b> | <b>Aspirant Group</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Enrollment</b>              | 638                    | 988               | 1,300                 |
| <b>Freshman Retention Rate</b> | 57%                    | 65%               | 70%                   |
| <b>Cost to Attend</b>          | \$30,650               | \$32,490          | \$37,990              |
| <b>Tuition Revenue</b>         | \$13 Million           | \$19 Million      | \$34 Million          |
| <b>Endowment</b>               | \$19.6 Million         | \$36 Million      | \$60.5 Million        |

As is evidenced by these numbers, Brevard College lags behind their peer group in enrollments and endowment, but keeps their tuition competitive. With regard to annual giving benchmarks taken from 2008

to 2011, Brevard's peer group raised an average of \$6.4 million a year while Brevard raised an average of \$2.4 million a year. The peer groups had six to seven development staff to Brevard's four. For the sake of comparison, that breaks down to roughly \$900,000 raised per staff member for the peer group and \$600,000 raised by staff member for Brevard College.

As we have reported, Brevard's budget is heavily tuition dependent; eighty percent of their operating budget comes from tuition while the remainder comes from development supplements, foundations, grants, and auxiliary income (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication, July 8, 2013). Members of the Leadership Team explain vacillating enrollments trends, compounded by an unclear mission and vision, have resulted in difficulty soliciting donations to the college (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication, July 8, 2013). Additionally, a recent history of poor financial management may have caused potential donors to question how the college stewards their financial contributions.

Brevard has struggled to overcome financial hardship—an operational imbalance now offset with positive operating results in fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 (Business Wire, 2012). After weathering this period of financial instability, Fitch Ratings revised their rating and affirmed Brevard with a “B+” rating in October of 2012. Business Wire (2012) reports, “The college's ability to sustain positive operating performance is expected to allow balance sheet resources to recover, which could lead to upward rating movement over time” (para. 5). Brevard College's annual operating budget is heavily reliant on student-generated revenues like tuition (average of 73.8 percent of total revenues over the last five fiscal years). Since enrollment has not increased, other operating expenses were cut in order to control costs. Administrators made difficult decisions to freeze or reduce salaries and maintain vacancies on open positions. Further improvement in the financial position is largely contingent upon expanding the revenue base via enrollment growth and better management of debts and resources, which, in turn, should bolster donor confidence. In its forthcoming strategic plan, Brevard has yearly benchmarks for improving its Composite Financial Index (CFI). For the 2013 admissions cycle, the college has seen promising gains in applicants, suggesting opportunity for enrollment growth in the near future.

### **Brevard College Advancement Services Profile**

Over the past ten years, the average dollars raised per year is \$2.4 million (including estates), with a range of \$1 million to \$3.6 million in any given year. Donations come from a composite of alumni, friends, churches, estates, businesses and foundations, trustees, and faculty and staff. Each year, Brevard receives \$130,000 from churches, although this type of support has been significantly decreasing over the past 10 years (\$200,000 in 2003 to \$25,000 on 2013). \$390,000 in donations is gifted by businesses and foundations, \$26,000 from faculty and staff, \$695,000 from estates, and \$604,000 from trustees.

Administrators find it concerning that local community members of Brevard contribute more consistently than their

Administrators find it concerning that local community members of Brevard contribute more consistently than their alumni population. Alumni contribute an average of \$250,000 per year while “friends” of Brevard College donate approximately \$335,000 a year.

alumni population. Alumni contribute an average of \$250,000 per year while “friends” of Brevard College donate approximately \$335,000 a year. This is an average over the past ten years, from 2003 to 2013. “Friends” are primarily community members who live in the town of Brevard (often retirees), but this also includes parents or family members of students enrolled at Brevard College. It is a unique trend to find community members with no affiliation to the institution committing more support than students who studied at Brevard College. Only a small percentage of alumni make donations to Brevard; six-percent of alumni give at present (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication July 8, 2013). Currently, only two four-year alumni give more than \$10,000. To provide a framework to evaluate the magnitude of impact that fundraising can have at Brevard College, consider a ‘transformational’ gift to Brevard: this would be a gift of \$100,000 or more (S. Cothorn, personal communication, July 8, 2013).

Gifts are broken down into three funding streams: operations, capital, and endowment. The majority of dollars raised are used for operational expenses, 63 percent of the yearly donations. Fifteen percent is capital and 22 percent is gifted to the endowment. With Brevard so heavily dependent on tuition and fundraising for operations, it is easy to see how they struggle with a low endowment. Healthy operational funding would allow for more money to be applied to the endowment, and donors see an increasing endowment a sign of long-term financial security and health.

Endowed gifts are a gift of perpetual support to the college. Interestingly, alumni give almost twice as much (\$135,000 versus \$71,000) to the endowment than friends. Friends are more likely to give to the operational budget to support the day to day functions of the college—changes they can witness in real time. With friends surpassing alumni in yearly giving, it is not a surprise that a greater proportion of dollars raised feeds the operational budget. What we see evidence of is a cycle of Brevard’s financial struggles (assessed both by their own standards and as compared to peers) leading to hesitation on the part of alumni donors who may question the long-term viability of the college. A lack of confidence in past leadership and stewarding of funds has also contributed to donor reluctance. This hesitancy comes at a time when their gifts would have the most impact, but confidence must first be regained. The new president is focusing on doing just that.

### **Brevard’s Request for Assistance**

Brevard College administrators initially posed the following project topic to our team: “Benchmarks that Brevard College should have hit after transition from a two-year to a four-year comprehensive college 15 years ago” (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication, July 8, 2013). Last year Brevard’s advancement office solicited assistance from a business course, “Principles of Total Quality Management,” to appraise alumni outreach and information management. They compiled an assessment and made recommendations to the advancement office; our team will be building upon these previously initiated assessments by this class of undergraduate business students. According to our Brevard’s documentation the main goal of that project was to improve outreach and messaging to alumni.

Brevard College initiated the Total Quality Management (TQM) program to assess the effectiveness of Brevard’s staff and their communication with particular customers and stakeholders. Currently the Alumni Outreach Program uses direct mailings (i.e., the Mountain Currents newsletter, an anniversary gift letter, and a pre-phone-a-thon card), monthly email blasts, and a phone-a-thon to contact alumni. These three program activities are intended to strengthen the connection between Brevard College and its alumni. The TQM

evaluation found that Brevard College faces significant challenges such as having limited manpower to create change, having limited data about alumni, and having to change communication preferences for certain age groups. Bringing in our team to consult is the next step in Brevard's evaluation process.

Brevard College outlined the following questions for a benchmarking study in their initial request to our team:

- What was the initial enrollment attrition, stagnation, or growth upon transitioning from a two- to a four-year college of other colleges immediately in the 15 years after their transition?
- How do we most effectively communicate the College's mission and identity to the two-year alums to build/retain loyalty to their two-year alma mater?
- How to establish and build brand identity and quality as a new four-year institution?
- How do we recruit successful alumni (and others) to our Board of Trustees?
- Where should alumni giving (participation levels) be after 15 years as a four-year institution, and how do we increase that giving to levels acceptable for a four-year college?
- How do we best overcome the issue of "competing loyalties" with our two-year alums that furthered their education at other four-year colleges?
- How do we effectively utilize different communication vehicles to communicate to both alumni constituents, the two- and four-year alums, understanding they have had different experiences and perceptions of the College?
- What other key benchmarks should the College hope to achieve within the next 10-15 years? (Brevard Executive Leadership Team, personal communication, July 8, 2013).

### **The Narrative: Arriving at a Shared Understanding of the Project**

Upon initial review, we saw many different directions in which the project could go, so we pinpointed what we thought were three salient themes or possible research agendas to further explore and evaluate with Brevard's leadership team. The initial resources provided and communication with administration conveyed a positive outlook, in our minds, for Brevard College's organizational plan. Brevard provided us with a thorough description of the institution's challenges and goals, which has informed our project conceptualization.

We developed three potential models for our inquiry to guide our thinking and help direct our conversations with Brevard leadership:

- Alumni engagement: How are alumni engaged? How can they be more engaged?
- Enrollment trends: How has the two to four year transition altered the college's enrollment?
- Mission identity and clarity: What is the saga of Brevard College?

At this phase in project conceptualization, we were unsure if Brevard would want us to explore all three themes or if they would prefer a focus on specific models of inquiry. After meeting with Brevard College's leadership team to discuss the project, we learned the project was sponsored by the Advancement Office and thus would be focused primarily on fundraising and the impact of the transition, enrollment, and mission on philanthropy.



As a result, we adjusted our project focus accordingly. Working collaboratively with Brevard, we revised our project to explore the following points of inquiry as agreed upon jointly by our team and Brevard's leadership team: (1) What is the perception of Brevard College among alumni and friends of the institution? (2) What institutional history and characteristics have contributed to low levels of alumni giving? (3) How do enrollment trends impact subsequent alumni giving? This new model more easily allowed for an evaluation of the impact of key challenges as they directly relate to fundraising.

As the project progressed and we began to collect data, we became aware of limitations for data collection as related to enrollment trends. Our team had planned to compare enrollment and giving pre- and post-transition, but it was discovered that data was not available on either giving history or enrollment prior to around 2003. As a result, it would have been impossible to compare enrollment trends and giving pre- and post-transition without this information. Therefore, we made final revisions and omitted our third study question on enrollment trends.

Brevard leadership expressed more interest in comparing certain benchmarks with similar institutions so we incorporated a final study question as our third point of inquiry. Reviewing Brevard's original project request, the college's leadership team feels as though they have not met some of the benchmarks the college aimed for following the transition from a two-year to four-year school, specifically in regards to enrollments and fundraising. Some areas of interest to Brevard are: enrollment trends, communication of the institution's mission, brand identity and marketing, and alumni participation and giving. More specifically, how did other schools' enrollments fare following the transition and what impact, if any, was there on philanthropic gifts to the schools? Brevard wants to learn how to engage both the two-year and four-year alumni populations and manage the "competing loyalties" of the two-year alumni that go on to other bachelor's degree granting institutions. They would like to see how they compare to peer institutions on these issues. This third point of inquiry will allow us to explore organizational saga around institutions shifting function and mission. Finally, we adjusted the wording on our second point of inquiry to explore personal characteristics that have contributed to low levels of alumni giving rather than institutional characteristics. Our benchmarking project considers institutional characteristics, so adjusting the second point of inquiry diversifies our project questions and allows us to create a more comprehensive approach.



# Statement of the Problem

## A Three-Pronged Approach

First, Brevard expressed a primary concern with alumni giving. Alumni appear to contribute smaller amounts and less frequently than local friends and donors of Brevard College. Administrators presume this happens due to extenuating circumstances such as enrollment trends and mission ambiguity. Our aim is to discover how and why the propensity of donations varies between alumni and friends.

Secondly, Brevard was going through an identity crisis. Before the transition from a two-year to a four-year institution in 1995, the music and wilderness education programs were the standout factor for Brevard College, but over time the distinguishing characteristics of Brevard became less distinctive in comparison with similar institutions. Brevard College aspires to mitigate its identity crisis by focusing on their image portrayal to alumni and, ultimately, to increase monetary donations. We propose a primarily qualitative study to provide a descriptive analysis of what influences Brevard alumni to give.

Thirdly, it was difficult to gauge how successfully Brevard transitioned from a two-year to four-year institution. Not only did the transition happen rather quickly, but it also took place with poor planning and little guidance. Regardless, was the transition a triumph or failure? Our aim is to identify what benchmarks determine success when a small liberal arts college transitions from a two-year to four-year institution and how Brevard College compares with similar colleges.

## Project Questions in Their Finality

After rounds of feedback between our team and the Brevard leadership team, we arrived at the following project questions in their finality:

**Question I:** What personal characteristics contribute to low levels of alumni giving?

**Question II:** What is the perception of Brevard College among alumni and friends of the institution?

**Question III:** How does Brevard College compare to benchmarks of similar liberal arts institutions that have successfully transitioned from a 2-year to 4-year college?

Our aim is to provide substantive recommendations for Brevard College based on our findings from the alumni survey, one-on-one interviews with Brevard friends, and benchmarking aspects of similar institutions. (See Figure 2).

**Design**

In order to explore our study questions, we will use mixed methods—both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Mixed methods research allows us to analyze each project question from a multifaceted perspective. “It is an expansive and creative form of research, not a limiting form of research; it is inclusive, pluralistic, and complementary, and it suggests that researchers take an eclectic approach to method selection, the thinking about, and conduct of research” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). The first two study questions will be analyzed through an alumni survey and one-on-one interviews with Brevard friends. First, we will construct and distribute a survey for all Brevard alumni. The survey will allow us to gather both quantitative and qualitative data including individuals’ giving history and their reasons for giving. It will also explore alumni perceptions of Brevard, alumni perceptions of Brevard’s mission, and key experiences that frame their college experience. We will also explore how the perception of Brevard among alumni has changed over the years and whether alumni view their education at Brevard as transactional or transformational. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Second, we will coordinate standard interview protocol with local community members, “friends” of the college, who are donors. This will allow us to explore and compare their reasons for giving and perception of Brevard in the surrounding community, and the college’s contribution to the city of Brevard, North Carolina. A list of the questions can be found in Appendix B.

The third study question will be a descriptive study comparing benchmarks with analogous schools. In order to provide Brevard with some narrative around their current position in the higher education market place, we will collect descriptive data from other schools that have been the transition from two year to four year schools, specifically exploring alumni giving trends before during, and after the transition. Benchmarking questions can be found in Appendix C. We contemplated each project question to figure out the best method of analysis. The rationale behind each project question led us to a mixed methods research approach (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Methodological Framework and Analytical Approach**

|                | ALUMNI SURVEY  | FRIENDS INTERVIEWS                                      | BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS  |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| RATIONALE      | Determining What Compels Brevard Alumni to Contribute to the College | Understanding Why Local Friends Engage with the College | Assessing Brevard's Progress against Similarly-Situated Institutions' Best Practices |
| ANALYTIC TOOLS | Descriptive Statistics<br>Means Analysis<br>Cohort Analysis          | Structured Thematic & Content Analysis                  | Unstructured Thematic & Content Analysis   |

# Project Question I: Alumni Giving

For project question one, we sought to explore what personal characteristics of alumni contributed to low levels of alumni giving. We first consider our conceptual framework and review the extant literature as a means to guide our inquiry for this project question. Next, we present our four hypotheses developed to assess philanthropic behaviors of Brevard College alumni. We then outline the methodology used to test each hypothesis. Finally, we look to summarize significant findings and discuss their practical significance for Brevard College.

## **In This Section**

Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses

Methodology

Data Analysis for Project Question I

Summary and Practical Significance of Findings

## Conceptual Framework

### Why are people philanthropic?

Theoretical foundations for philanthropy fall into one of any number of categories: economics, altruism, utility, equity, and social exchange. Radcliffe (2011) finds that “social exchange theory” has emerged as a favorite means of explanation in the field of educational philanthropy. Social exchange theory suggests that donations are made in return for some type of emotional benefit: positive feelings, connection, and/or access (Radcliffe, 2011). In other words, an arrangement is created in which both parties benefit. Using this theory, alumni might make donations in order to benefit from “the college’s continued or improved reputation, and any special privileges or attention that giving confers on alumni donors, especially the public recognition bestowed by having benefactors’ names listed in college publications or appearing on plaques, special rooms, labs, or buildings” (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995, p. 54). It should be added that philanthropy is an interdisciplinary concept, not belonging to any particular field of study; it is best considered contextually and as part of a larger system rather than an event in isolation.

### Donor Characteristics: Who is most likely to give?

The conceptual framework for this project question draws from the literature on alumni engagement and giving, which is relatively limited. The majority of the research exploring educational philanthropy relates to individual characteristics of alumni and giving behaviors (Radcliffe, 2011). Philanthropy and an individual’s choice to give back to their college is incredibly complex. In general, we cannot predict with any high level of accuracy if a particular person will give, but when considering groups as a whole, patterns start to emerge. Another challenge with the existing research is that much of it is institution specific, which promotes practical application, but raises concerns about generalizability.

The literature on alumni giving falls primarily into two major categories, donor demographics or characteristics and donor attitudes and beliefs (Radcliffe, 2011). Most research on donor attitude is self-reported data on matters like student experience, current engagement with one’s alma mater, and impressions of the institution.

The extant literature suggests that donor demographics along with donor attitudes & beliefs constitute the predictors of alumni giving at an institution.

**Demographics.** Donor demographics that are most commonly correlated with giving are age and income. Giving increases with age until it plateaus at some point and then begins to peter out (Watsyn, 2009; Clotfelter, 2001). Giving also increased with income, which could be expected since earning potential increases over one’s lifetime (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Clotfelter, 2001). Giving does not differ by gender or race (Radcliffe, 2011). This data is commonly used to identify potential donors, but is not practically important beyond identification, as schools cannot impact a person’s race, age, income, etc. in hopes to affect philanthropy.

Clotfelter (2003) notes legacies and students who graduated from the school where they first enrolled had a greater likelihood of giving. Marr, Mullin, and Seigfried (2005) also highlighted the relationship between legacy status and giving behavior: “family legacy adds significant financial, time, and emotional investment in a campus, and these ties are associated with alumni giving” (p. 98). Additionally, Marr et al. (2005) studied the

receipt of financial aid on giving behaviors and found that students who received need-based aid were less likely to be donors while those that received merit aid were more likely to make donations. They also report “students who enjoyed academic success donate slightly more often as alumni” (p. 140).

**Student Engagement.** Studies on alumni giving behaviors find that alumni who were engaged on campus as students are more likely to give (Clotfelter, 2003; Gaier, 2005; and Hoyt, 2004). Clotfelter (2003) explores a number of student characteristics to determine giving behaviors and found that “alumni who once had a leadership position in an extracurricular activity gave more than those who did not” (p. 129). Gaier (2005) finds that alumni who participated in at least one student activity during college were 87 percent more likely to give than those that did not. Interestingly, alumni who report “someone who took a special interest in them during college” were also more likely to give (Clotfelter, 2003, p. 129). Engaged alumni are typically more satisfied alumni, suggesting that satisfaction should also predict giving behaviors (Astin, 1985).

**Alumni Engagement.** It is common knowledge in the field of education philanthropy that more involved, connected alumni are more likely to contribute financial to their alma mater (Hoyt, 2004; Wastyn, 2009; and Clotfelter, 2003). What makes an alumni want to be involved? First, there is a strong relationship between how one views their alma mater and their level of engagement (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). “A strong belief in the organization, its management and its mission” is a common donor motivation (Watsyn, 2008). Alternatively, alumni may donate because they want to repay their good fortune, or “feel responsible for the welfare of the institution” (Baldwin, 2008, p. 40).

A lesser-known fact about alumni engagement is that alumni who are more satisfied with their academic experience are more likely to be involved with their college. Gaier (2005) reported a statistically significant relationship between alumni involvement and satisfaction with one’s student experience. This highlights the systemic nature of giving behaviors and the need for interdepartmental collaboration in order to make a significant impact on the cultivation of future donors.

**Student Attitude and Satisfaction.** Clotfelter (2001) reports that alumni who are “very satisfied” with their undergraduate institution are more likely to give back. Inversely, alumni who are dissatisfied with certain aspects of their experience are less likely to donate. These subjective feelings of satisfaction about the institution have a major impact on giving (Hoyt, 2004; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Gaier, 2005; Marr et al., 2005; and Clotfelter, 2001). Gaier (2005) investigates whether satisfaction with academics or social experiences in college matters more to future giving behaviors. Results suggests that a positive relationship between alumni giving and satisfaction with academics and between alumni giving and satisfaction with extracurricular activities. Quality of instruction in one’s major field and interaction with faculty are important to academic satisfaction while involvement in a formal student activity is most important to social satisfaction.

The consensus is that student experience is the single best indicator of alumni giving, but in general, this is out of an advancement services sphere of impact (Clotfelter, 2001; Gaier, 2005; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Hoyt, 2004; and Radcliffe, 2011). The loosely-coupled system that is a college makes systemic changes across functional areas challenging (Weick, 1976), but at a small, intimate school like Brevard, there is opportunity for collaboration and action.

## Hypotheses

For project question one, we sought to explore what personal characteristics of alumni contributed to low levels of alumni giving. To do so, we draw directly from the categories outlined in our conceptual framework: alumni demographics and characteristics, student engagement, alumni engagement, and student attitude and satisfaction. We make the following five hypotheses:

**Hypothesis I:** That the more involved alumni were while students at Brevard, the more likely they are to give. We expect that alumni who were involved with or lead student organizations, played sports, etc., would be more likely to give back to Brevard College.

**Hypothesis II:** That the more fond memories an alumnus reports from their time at Brevard, the more likely they are to contribute financially in the present.

**Hypothesis III:** That the more positive one's experience at Brevard, the more likely they are to donate to the college.

**Hypothesis IV:** That the more engaged and connected an alumni feels to Brevard, the more likely they are to give.

**Hypothesis V:** That there will be significant differences between two-year alumni and four-year alumni on our three scales and on giving behaviors. institutions that have successfully transitioned from a 2-year to 4-year college?

Beyond these five hypotheses, we look for giving patterns related to alumni personal characteristics, thoughts, and/or perceptions that might be of value to Brevard College administrators in their fundraising campaigns.

## Methodology

### Sampling Procedure and Subjects

Our population for the alumni survey was all Brevard College alumni, including both alumni of Brevard as a two-year college and Brevard as a four-year college. We used a convenience sample, sampling all alumni with valid email address for a total of 3,159 people. This was one third of the approximately 9,300 Brevard College alumni on record.

### Survey Development

We developed the survey that was administered, drawing from similar surveys administered at other institutions to gauge alumni engagement and giving. Questions were drawn from Colorado College and Oberlin College, as well as from the Engagement Strategies Group Mood of Alumni 2010 Survey (Hanover Research, 2011; Engagement Strategies Group, 2010; and Oberlin College, 2004). The Mood of Alumni Survey “explored how alumni perceive their alma mater, their giving behavior to their alma mater versus other good causes, and what attitudes and perceptions act as barriers to giving—or giving more—to their alma mater” (Engagement Strategies Group, 2010, p. 1). Using questions from existing measures helped us, in

some sense, to “pilot” our questions by relying on successful past implementation. Compiling our own survey allowed for items to be tailored to Brevard College and our specific project question.

The survey was designed drawing from our conceptual framework on donor characteristics, student engagement, alumni engagement, and student satisfaction. The survey was divided into three sections and took approximately ten minutes to complete. The first section collected demographic information including gender, race, age, and various other student characteristics. The next section asked alumni to reflect on their experiences as a student at Brevard College; this allowed us to measure the construct of student engagement. Respondents were also probed about their perceptions of Brevard College to measure student satisfaction and subsequent alumni engagement. The final section focused on giving behaviors and history; respondents replied to prompts about why they gave or chose not to give to Brevard. A variety of question types were included, but the majority of questions were on a Likert scale (see Appendix A to review the survey in its entirety).

### **Survey Administration**

The survey was designed using RedCap, a Vanderbilt University web-based application for building and managing surveys. The survey was administered electronically; the link to access the survey was sent with an introductory email outlining the purpose of the study, discussing the collection procedures used, explaining anonymity and confidentiality, and providing the contact information of the investigators.

We chose to distribute the survey electronically both due to financial constraints and ease of data collection. The survey link was sent out on November 20, 2013 by Brevard College Advancement Services, embedded in their standard email template. The email originated from Brevard's generic alumni email address, alumni@brevard.edu. Sending the survey from Brevard College in their standard format legitimized the request and promoted visual recognition. The open rate for the first email was 34.8 percent, which was slightly higher than the average open rate for emails from the Advancement Office, 29.9 percent. Three hundred and twenty eight people clicked on the survey link embedded in this email. (See Figure 4 for a copy of the formatted email invitation).

Figure 4: Alumni Experience Survey Invitation



## Brevard College Alumni Experience Survey

*You are being invited to participate in a [survey](#) about your experience as a Brevard College student and alumnus. You will be asked to provide us with some information about your Brevard College experience. Your responses will help us learn more about alumni opinions regarding Brevard College and tailor our communications to what is most important to the alumni population. Following the study, we will share the findings on our website.*

This study is being conducted by Anna Thomas, Erin Perez, and Quinton Walker (Ed.D. candidates in Leadership, Policy, and Organizations at Vanderbilt University) in conjunction with the Philanthropic Development office at Brevard College. The study will be part of a doctoral capstone project for Vanderbilt University.

Participants in the survey are eligible for a drawing for a \$100 gift card to Amazon.com. To be considered for the drawing, please follow the link at the conclusion of the survey to a second brief survey form where you will be asked to provide your email address. Your e-mail will only be used for the drawing—it is not linked to your responses in any way. **You can access the survey at the following URL: <https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/?s=lo9QXisZEU>.** Please complete the survey by **Monday, December 9, 2013.**

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The questionnaire will take about 10 minutes to complete.

This survey is anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name and no IP addresses will be collected. Your data will be assigned a random participant code as an identifier. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Only the research personnel listed above will have access to the survey data.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. *By completing and submitting the survey via the link below, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate.* You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you encounter any problems or have any questions about the study, please contact:

**Anna Thomas**  
Investigator  
[thomasak@brevard.edu](mailto:thomasak@brevard.edu)  
615-500-4995

Per the literature on the topic of response rates to electronic surveys, we chose to send a reminder email and offer an incentive to encourage participation to increase the survey response rate (Nulty, 2008). We sent a follow up reminder email ten days after the original email—same design—but this time the email came from a personal Brevard email address rather than the generic alumni email. We hoped to capture both the people who typically open emails from Brevard Advancement Services as well as those who may habitually delete or

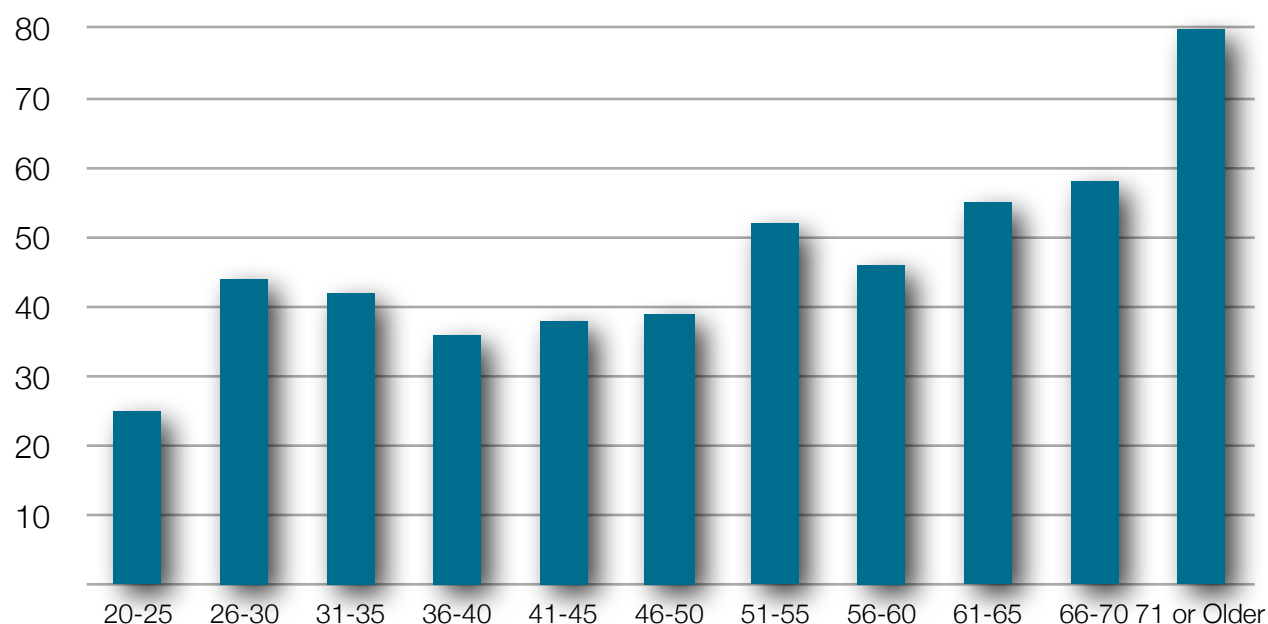


ignore emails from Brevard's generic email address. The survey was open for a total of two and a half weeks. The open rate for the reminder email was 28.9 percent; 253 people clicked on the survey link embedded in this email. We incentivized responses with an optional entry into a drawing for a \$100 Amazon.com gift card following successful completion of the survey. Roughly half of the respondents chose to enter the drawing.

### Characteristics of the Respondents

There were 3,159 alumni invited to participate; 3,071 emails were successfully delivered (did not bounce back). We received 549 responses (470 complete responses and 79 partial responses), resulting in an 18 percent response rate. As a result, our sample for analytical purposes included 470 responses. Fifty-five percent of the responders were male and 45 percent female. Ninety-four percent of responders were white and the other 6 percent were persons of color. Respondents ranged in age from 20 to over 70 years old (see Figure 5). In terms of degree's held, 55 percent of responders received associate degrees from Brevard College and all but 35 of those people went on to complete a bachelor's degree elsewhere. Twenty-five percent of responders received a bachelor's degree from Brevard, 14 percent transferred to another institution, and 5 percent of responders never completed a college degree. Furthermore, 32 percent of the sample was first-generation college students.

**Figure 5: Alumni Survey Respondents' Ages by Cohort**



### Assessing Non-Responder Bias Using Late Responders as a Proxy

Survey reminders are often used to encourage non-responders to participate in surveys. Given the nature of our survey, we expected that our respondents were more likely to be engaged with Brevard and relatively satisfied with their Brevard College experience. Since we were investigating poor giving participation, we also explored methods to encourage participation from alumni who may be less engaged/satisfied with the College since this is the group we are interested in learning more about. To do this, we used a survey

reminder: several studies have investigated survey response time and the differences between early and late responders. Late responders can sometimes be used as a proxy for typical non-responders, so we used a cohort analysis to compare early and late responders to check for non-response bias (Miller & Smith, 1983; Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). It should be noted that non-response bias is still a threat to validity given that this type of assessment is only a proxy.

To compare early and late responders, we measured the mean and standard deviation of each group on history of giving and on each of the three scales. We calculated the difference in means and then computed the effect size, using Cohen's *d*. When we compared early and late survey responders, we found no significant differences in giving history (effect size using Cohen's *d* = - .08). Furthermore, we compared the early and late responders on our three scales and found no statistically significant differences (Cohen's *d* ranged from .03 to .21 on the three scales, all small effect sizes) (see Table 2). By using late responders as surrogate for non-responders, the resulting comparison can be used as a rough estimate for non-response bias. Therefore, we have some level of confidence that non-responder bias may not be an issue with our subject pool. That being said, Welch and Barlau (n.d.) note that this method "helps identify potential sources of error but does not indicate the extent of bias" (p. 16). Moving forward, all subjects were combined for analysis rather than separated by early and late responders.

**Table 2: Comparing Early and Late Responders**

|   | <b>Early Responders</b> | <b>Late Responders</b> | <b>Difference</b> | <b>Effect Size*</b> |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Giving History                          | .42<br>(.495)           | .46<br>(.499)          | .04               | -.08                |
| Fondness Index                          | 5.24<br>(2.71)          | 4.64<br>(2.92)         | .60               | .21                 |
| Campus Involvement Index                | 1.53<br>(1.04)          | 1.30<br>(1.09)         | .23               | .21                 |
| Positive Undergraduate Experience Index | 4.35<br>(.579)          | 4.33<br>(.597)         | .02               | .03                 |

Note: Standard deviations appear in parenthesis below the means.

\*Effect size expressed as Cohen's *D*.

## Data Analysis for Project Question I

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze our data. We began by creating scales to organize our data and test our hypotheses. Three types of analysis were used for hypothesis testing. First, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression Model was performed using the three scales (campus involvement, fondness for Brevard, and positive undergraduate experience) to determine predictors of giving behaviors. We simultaneously test our first three hypotheses in this regression model. We also performed a second OLS regression to determine if certain alumni characteristics were determinants of giving behaviors (hypothesis four). Second, Chi Square tests allowed us to further explore the relationships between giving history and a number of student characteristics. Third, independent sample T-Tests were used to compare means on our scales for alumni status to see if there were significant differences between two- and four-year alumni of Brevard College (hypothesis five).

## Variables Used in Project Question I

Giving history was initially measured in our survey as the number of years out of the past four years that a donation was made to Brevard College (i.e. none out of four, one or two out of four, three out of four, and four out of four). For data analysis purposes, giving history was recoded into a binary variable, history of giving (coded as 1) or no history of giving (coded as 0).

We developed three scales, a direct outgrowth of our conceptual framework on the undergraduate student experience, to help answer our project question. Since the literature suggests student engagement is directly linked to subsequent alumni giving behaviors, our first scale, a 'campus involvement' scale, was developed to measure the construct of student engagement discussed in our conceptual framework (Clotfelter, 2003; Gaier, 2005; and Hoyt, 2004). Survey respondents were provided a list of student characteristics and asked to check boxes for the activities they participated in during their time at Brevard. There were fourteen options, but we chose to focus on the four related to campus activities (organization membership, organization leadership, resident advisor, and student athlete). The scale we created summed the selected activities for each respondent (possible range of responses: 0 to 4). The mean on this scale was  $M = 1.4$ . This type of scale, a Likert scale, assumes linearity in strength or intensity of experience (McLeod, 2008).

The second scale was termed the 'fondness for Brevard' scale, aimed at assessing the construct of student satisfaction which the literature also suggests predicts alumni giving behaviors (Hoyt, 2004; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; and Gaier, 2005; Clotfelter, 2001). The concept of "fondness" was also used by Cunningham & Cochi-Ficano (2002) as they explored how student activities, specifically fraternities and sororities, contributed to alumni's fond memories, which then encouraged subsequent donation. This sixteen-item Likert scale summed the number of elements that responders reported shaped their fondest memories of Brevard College (ex. roommate, professor, sports team, residence hall). The possible range of responses was one to sixteen, but the mean for this scale was  $M = 5$ .

Our third scale was a different approach to assessing the construct of student satisfaction; we termed this the 'positive undergraduate experience' scale. It measured the respondent's impression of their undergraduate experience at Brevard College. The following items were included on the scale. Each item was on a five point Likert scale, strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1):

- Has an excellent faculty ( $M = 4.38$ )
- Has a supportive environment that helps students thrive ( $M = 4.35$ )
- Offers a unique college experience ( $M = 4.42$ )
- Displays a strong sense of values and ethics ( $M = 4.24$ )

The scale was computed by averaging each respondent's scores on these four items. To determine the reliability of the scale by checking the internal consistency of the items on this scale, we computed a Cronbach's alpha,  $\alpha = .818$ .

Finally, three variables from the survey were used to assess the construct of alumni engagement. Mission embodiment and sense of responsibility were measured on five point Likert scales, strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The mean for these items were  $M = 4.26$  and  $M = 3.61$  respectively. Perceived level of

alumni connection to Brevard was also measured on a five point Likert scale with 1 being not at all connected to 5 being strongly connected. The mean for this item was  $M = 3.53$ .

### Hypothesis Testing: OLS Regression Model

In order to determine if undergraduate experience campus involvement, fondness for Brevard, and positive undergraduate experience predicted subsequent donations to the college, we performed a linear regression (to test hypotheses one, two, and three). As our dependent variable, we used the previously created binary variable for history of giving. For model one, we entered the indices of interest into the model, campus involvement, fondness for Brevard, and positive undergraduate experience. Since donor demographics have been evidenced to play a major role in giving behaviors, we decided to control for certain personal characteristics (Radcliffe, 2011).

For model two, we added age, race, gender, and degree earned as control variables. This model is more robust than model one since we are controlling for other variables that might also influence giving behaviors. Gender was coded 0 for “male” and 1 for “female.” Since age was reported in our survey categorically (i.e. 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, etc.), we recoded age as an ordinal variable: 1 to 11 with 1 being the youngest group (age 20-25) and 11 being the oldest group (age 71 and older). Dummy variables were created for race by coding “white” as 0 and “persons of color” as 1. Dummy variables were also created for degree earned, which were reported categorically in our survey. “The number of dummy variables necessary to represent a single attribute variable is equal to the number of levels (categories) in the variable minus one” (Skrivanek, 2009, p. 1). So, for degree earned, which was reported categorically in four categories, we created three dummy variables with associate’s degree as the reference group. Finally, we also added four other variables in as controls: legacy status, honor student status, and financial aid status (both need and merit based aid). These four student characteristics are considered predictors of giving behaviors, as discussed in our conceptual framework (Clotfelter, 2003 and Marr et al., 2005). Each of these four variables was binary, coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no.

To better understand our regression results, we examine the correlations between independent variables. This allows us to identify potential problems with multicollinearity (Ethington, Thomas, & Pike, 2002). We use tests of tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF), which “regress each independent variable on the other independent variables in the model” (Ethington et al., 2002, p. 286). Ethington notes that tolerances lower than .10 and VIF values higher than 10 are indicators of high multicollinearity. For this regression model, the tolerances ranged from .37 to .98 and VIF values ranged from 1.0 to 2.7, suggesting high collinearity is not a problem and further supporting our model’s predictive ability.

Similarly, in order to determine if alumni engagement characteristics predicted giving, we performed a second linear regression model (to test our fourth hypothesis). As our dependent variable, we used the previously created binary variable for history of giving. For model one, we entered the indices of interest into the model: sense of responsibility, mission embodiment, and level of connection to Brevard. For model two, we controlled for the all the personal characteristics controlled for in the previous model discussed above. Again, model two is a more robust test of our hypotheses since it controls for other variables that might influence giving. For this model, we also tested the correlations between independent variables to rule out

multicollinearity. The tolerances ranged from .38 to .98 and VIF values ranged from 1.0 to 2.9, suggesting high collinearity is not a problem and further supporting our model's predictive ability.

To account for incomplete survey responses, we excluded missing data "pairwise" in all regression models. This allowed us to still include cases with complete data for the pair of variables being correlated rather than removing that subject from the regression altogether. We report both  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  in our regression table;  $R^2$  is a more conservative measure used when a model has a large number of independent variables. We also report both unstandardized coefficients and standardized coefficients for the sake of comparison. We use a statistical significance level of  $p \leq .05$  for all data analysis.

Regression Model Fit for Undergraduate Experience. Model one was only able to account for 5.4 percent of the variance in giving history,  $F(3, 483) = 10.212, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .054$ . For model two, controls were entered for age, gender, race, degree earned, legacy status, financial aid, and honor student status. The resulting fully specified, thirteen-predictor model was able to account for 14.3 percent of the variance in giving history,  $F(13, 464) = 7.11, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .143$ . Both models were significantly greater than zero. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Summary of OLS determinants of Campus Involvement, Fondness for Brevard, and Positive Undergraduate Experience on Giving History**

| Variable                    | Dependent Variable:<br>Giving History           |  |   |   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|---|
|                             | Model 1   |  | Model 2   |   |
|                             | Unstandardized<br>Coefficients<br><i>B</i> (SE) | Standardized<br>Coefficients ( $\beta$ ) | Unstandardized<br>Coefficients<br><i>B</i> (SE) | Standardized<br>Coefficients<br>( $\beta$ ) |
| Constant                    | -.202<br>(.166)                                 | ...                                      | -.718<br>(.210)                                 | ...   |
| Campus Involvement          | .093**<br>(.023)                                | .199**                                   | .065**<br>(.024)                                | .139**                                      |
| Fondness for Brevard        | -.014<br>(.009)                                 | -.079                                    | .001<br>(.009)                                  | .006  |
| Positive Undergraduate Exp. | .142**<br>(.040)                                | .167**                                   | .121**<br>(.039)                                | .142**                                      |
| Gender                      | ...   | ...                                      | .040<br>(.044)                                  | .040  |
| Race                        | ...   | ...                                      | .078<br>(.110)                                  | .031  |
| Age <sup>a</sup>            | ...   | ...                                      | .063**<br>(.011)                                | .403**                                      |
| Merit Aid                   | ...   | ...                                      | .030<br>(.056)                                  | .029  |
| Need-Based Aid              | ...   | ...                                      | -.094<br>(.049)                                 | -.088                                       |
| Honor Student               | ...   | ...                                      | .085<br>(.053)                                  | .080  |
| Legacy                      | ...   | ...                                      | .057<br>(.075)                                  | .033  |

| Degree Earned <sup>b</sup> |      |      |        |        |
|----------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|
| Bachelor's degree          | ...  | .... | .165*  | .143*  |
|                            |      |      | (.081) |        |
| Transferred                | ...  | .... | .087   | .060   |
|                            |      |      | (.066) |        |
| No degree earned           | .... | ...  | -.219* | -.099* |
|                            |      |      | (.099) |        |
| <hr/>                      |      |      |        |        |
| <i>R Square</i>            |      | .060 |        | .166   |
| <i>Adj R Square</i>        |      | .054 |        | .143   |
| SEE                        |      | .486 |        | .463   |
| N                          |      | 487  |        | 478    |

Note: \*\* =  $p \leq .01$ ; \* =  $p \leq .05$ ; Standard errors are in parenthesis.

<sup>a</sup>Age was represented as ordinal data (1 to 11)

<sup>b</sup>Degree earned was represented as 3 dummy variables with associate degree serving as the reference group.

### Hypothesis One: Campus Involvement

**Regression Results.** Our first hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between giving and student campus involvement. To test this hypothesis we used our Linear Regression model. We found that students involved in campus organizations were 13.9 percent more likely to give to Brevard than those that were not; campus involvement significantly predicted giving behaviors,  $\beta = .139$ ,  $t(464) = 2.75$ ,  $p < .01$ . These results are consistent with what other researchers have learned about engagement and giving. “Research consistently shows that engaged college students are more likely to become engaged college alumni and that alumni engagement is a predictor of alumni giving” (Radcliffe, 2011, p. 17). Simply stated, the evidence supports our first hypothesis that the more involved alumni were as students, the more likely they are to donate to Brevard College.

As could be expected from the research, we also found that age was correlated with giving (Radcliffe, 2011 & Watsyn, 2009). Older alumni are 40 percent more likely to give than younger alumni. Race and gender were not significantly correlated with giving, but degree is significantly correlated with giving. Alumni earned a Bachelor’s degree from Brevard were 14.3 percent more likely to donate than those that earned an associate degree. In turn, alumni who earned an associate degree from Brevard were 9.9 percent more likely to be donors than alumni who did not earn a college degree. In some ways, this measure can be used as a proxy for income. Degree holders have higher lifetime earnings than non-degree holders. This may also tell us something about the differences in alumni or Brevard as a two-year institution and alumni of Brevard as a four-year institution.

**Chi Square Analysis.** As a follow-up to our regression analysis and in order to evaluate the relationship between specific responder characteristics and giving history, we used Chi Square tests. In order to run a Chi Square analysis, we used our binary variable created for Giving History. Comparisons were made between this binary variable and a number of other categorical variables, which served as our independent variables: legacy, organization leader, resident advisor, part time job, merit based aid, received need based aid, transfer students, transferred away from Brevard, first choice college, honor student, received career counseling, organizational involvement, degree earned, first generation college student, and switched majors.

As can be seen by the frequencies cross tabulated in Table 4, statistically significant relationships were found between history of giving and four items: organizational involvement  $X^2(1, N = 491) = 22.410, p < .001$ ; organization leader  $X^2(1, N = 491) = 10.663, p < .01$ ; transfer student  $X^2(1, N = 491) = 10.218, p < .01$ ; and degree earned  $X^2(3, N = 488) = 17.663, p < .01$ . We found different giving behaviors based on student characteristics. Specifically, these results suggest that giving behavior differed for alumni who were involved or leaders in campus organizations. Furthermore, giving behaviors also differed by type of degree earned and transfer status. These results parallel what is documented in the extant literature, a strong, positive relationship between giving and student involvement.

**Table 4: Summary of Crosstabulations: Student Characteristics and History of Giving to Brevard College**

| Comparison                                    | Pearson Chi Square | p value |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| Giving History vs. Legacy                     | 2.338              | .126    |
| Giving History vs. Organization Leader        | 10.663             | .001**  |
| Giving History vs. Resident Advisor           | .296               | .586    |
| Giving History vs. Part Time Job              | .096               | .757    |
| Giving History vs. Merit Based Aid            | .088               | .767    |
| Giving History vs. Received Need Based Aid    | 1.778              | .182    |
| Giving History vs. Transfer Student           | 10.218             | .001**  |
| Giving History vs. Transferred Away           | 1.606              | .205    |
| Giving History vs. First Choice College       | 2.967              | .085    |
| Giving History vs. Honor Student              | 3.015              | .082    |
| Giving History vs. Student Athlete            | 3.639              | .056    |
| Giving History vs. Received Career Counseling | .818               | .366    |
| Giving History vs. Organizational Involvement | 22.410             | .000**  |
| Giving History vs. Degree Earned              | 17.663             | .001**  |
| Giving History vs. First Generation Student   | 1.854              | .173    |
| Giving History vs. Switched Majors            | 2.988              | .084    |

**Note:** \*\*  $p \leq .01$

### Hypothesis Two: Fond Memories

**Regression Results.** Our second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between giving and the number of “fond” experiences alumni report from their time as students. To test this hypothesis we used our Linear Regression model. We found the number of fond memories students report from their time at Brevard was not significantly correlated with giving behavior. Our definition of what constitutes a “fond memory” may be an artificial construction, not getting at the intangibles that shape one’s overall college experience.

### Hypothesis Three: Satisfaction/Positive Undergraduate Experience

**Regression Results.** Our third hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between giving and satisfaction with one’s Brevard College experience. To test this hypothesis we used our Linear Regression model. We found that students who more satisfied with their undergraduate experience were 14.2 percent more likely to give to Brevard than those that were not; a positive undergraduate experience or satisfaction with one’s experience significantly predicted giving behaviors,  $\beta = .142, t(464) = 3.107, p < .01$ . These results are

consistent with what other researchers have learned about engagement and giving. “The research clearly established that among attitudinal variables, satisfaction with the student experience is by far the strongest predictor of alumni giving behavior” (Radcliffe, 2011, p. 4).

**Hypothesis Four: Alumni Engagement**

Hypothesis four predicted a positive relationship between sense of responsibility, connection to Brevard, and mission embodiment and giving history. See Figures 6, 7 and 8 for a breakdown of responses to these items. To test this hypothesis we used a Linear Regression model.

Figure 6:  
Do You Feel a Responsibility to Maintain Brevard?

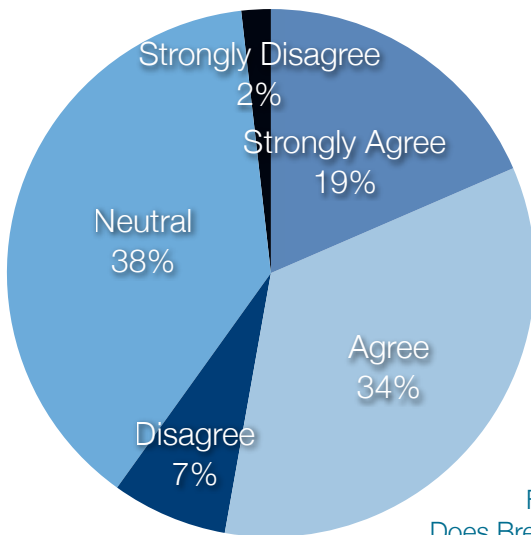


Figure 7:  
To What Extent are you Connected to Brevard?

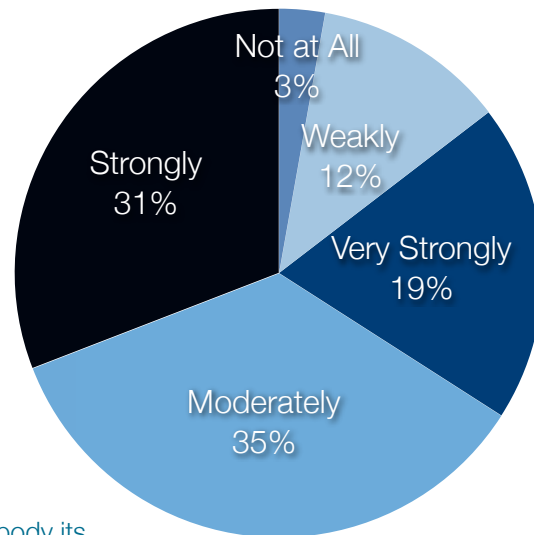
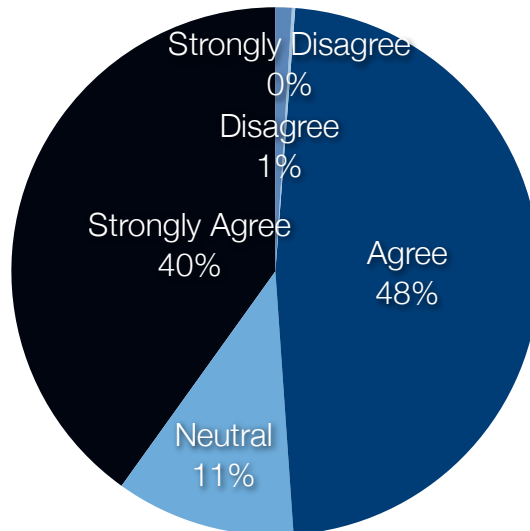


Figure 8:  
Does Brevard Embody its Mission?





**Regression Model Fit for Alumni Engagement.** Model one was only able to account for 14.4 percent of the variance in giving history,  $F(3, 480) = 28.07, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .144$ . For model two, controls were entered for age, gender, race, degree earned, legacy status, financial aid, and honor student status. The resulting fully specified, thirteen-predictor model was able to account for 23.5 percent of the variance in giving history,  $F(13, 464) = 12.27, p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .235$ . Both models were significantly greater than zero. See Table 5.

**Table 5: Summary of OLS Determinants of Alumni Engagement on Giving History**

| Variable                   | Dependent Variable:<br>Giving History           |  |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|---|
|                            | Model 1   |  | Model 2   |   |
|                            | Unstandardized<br>Coefficients<br><i>B</i> (SE) | Standardized<br>Coefficients ( $\beta$ ) | Unstandardized<br>Coefficients<br><i>B</i> (SE) | Standardized<br>Coefficients<br>( $\beta$ ) |
| Constant                   | -.133<br>(.133)                                 | ...                                      | -.440<br>(.177)                                 | ...   |
| Mission                    | -.058<br>(.034)                                 | -.082                                    | -.070*<br>(.033)                                | -.099*                                      |
| Connection                 | .056*<br>(.026)                                 | .115*                                    | .078**<br>(.026)                                | .159**                                      |
| Responsibility             | .183**<br>(.028)                                | .340**                                   | .166**<br>(.027)                                | .308**                                      |
| Gender                     | ...   | ...                                      | .023<br>(.041)                                  | .023  |
| Race                       | ...   | ...                                      | -.037<br>(.104)                                 | -.015                                       |
| Age <sup>a</sup>           | ...   | ...                                      | .053**<br>(.010)                                | .339**                                      |
| Merit Aid                  | ...   | ...                                      | .067<br>(.052)                                  | .064  |
| Need-Based Aid             | ...   | ...                                      | -.105*<br>(.046)                                | -.098*                                      |
| Honor Student              | ...   | ...                                      | .082<br>(.049)                                  | .077  |
| Legacy                     | ...   | ...                                      | .014<br>(.071)                                  | .008  |
| Degree Earned <sup>b</sup> |   |  |   |   |
| Bachelor's degree          | ...   | ....                                     | .016<br>(.078)                                  | .014  |
| Transferred                | ...   | ....                                     | .007<br>(.062)                                  | .005  |
| No degree earned           | ....  | ...                                      | -.185*<br>(.093)                                | -.083*                                      |
| <i>R Square</i>            |   | .149                                     |   | .256  |
| <i>Adj R Square</i>        |   | .144                                     |   | .235  |
| SEE                        |   | .463                                     |   | .437  |
| N                          |   | 484                                      |   | 478   |

Note: \*\* =  $p \leq .01$ ; \* =  $p \leq .05$ ; Standard errors are in parenthesis.

<sup>a</sup>Age was represented as ordinal data (1 to 11)

<sup>b</sup>Degree earned was represented as 3 dummy variables with associate degree serving as the reference group.

**Regression Results.** Although mission embodiment was not a significantly significant in model one, in model two all three items were statistically significant in predicting giving behaviors, although the relationship is not what we expected. We found that alumni who believed that Brevard embodied its mission were 9.9 percent less likely to give to Brevard than those that did not believe Brevard was living its mission,  $\beta = -.099$ ,  $t(464) = -2.141$ ,  $p < .05$ . Our findings also suggested that the higher an alumnus rated their level of connection to Brevard, the more likely they were to give, 15.9 percent more likely to be exact ( $\beta = .159$ ,  $t(464) = -2.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, we also have evidence that feelings of responsibility increase giving by 30.8 percent ( $\beta = .308$ ,  $t(464) = 6.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results on alumni connectedness and sense of responsibility are consistent with what other researchers have learned about alumni engagement and giving (Wastyn, 2009; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; and Baldwin, 2008).

**Hypothesis Five: Degree Status**

**T-Test.** We used T-Tests to compare the means of alumni who earned an associate degree versus alumni who earned a Bachelor’s degree on each of our three scales (see Table 6). To account for incomplete survey responses, we excluded missing data “analysis by analysis.” This allowed us to still include cases with valid data for the tested variable rather than removing that subject from the test altogether. We found statistically significant differences between types of degrees on the campus involvement index,  $t(423) = 1.040$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the fondness for Brevard index,  $t(423) = 3.829$ ,  $p < .05$ . For philanthropy, (as reported in the regression above) we found that alumni holding a Bachelor’s degree were 14.3 percent more likely to give than alumni holding an associate degree.

**TABLE 6: Differences between Degree Type on Alumni Indices**

|                            | Degree Earned from Brevard |                   | t      | df  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------|-----|
|                            | Associate degree           | Bachelor's degree |        |     |
| Campus Involvement Index   | 1.57<br>(.986)             | 1.68<br>(1.20)    | 1.040* | 423 |
| Fondness for Brevard Index | 5.06<br>(2.46)             | 6.14<br>(3.18)    | 3.829* | 423 |
| Positive Experience Index  | 4.36<br>(.582)             | 4.38<br>(.548)    | .386   | 404 |

Note: \* =  $p \leq .05$ , Standard deviations appear in parenthesis below the means.

**Ad Hoc Analysis: Other Survey Data**

We report survey data on reasons for not giving to Brevard as a way to get behind the statistical analysis and explore respondent’s reasoning. Fifty two percent of alumni responding to our survey reported no history of giving to Brevard in the last four years. To gather further data on why alumni choose not to give to Brevard College, we asked respondents to consider reasons for not giving. They were given a list of possible reasons for not giving and asked to select their level of agreement. Examples of items include: “I’d rather support organizations in my community,” “I don’t feel connected to Brevard,” and “I was not satisfied with my time at Brevard.” The breakdown of responses is presented in Tables 7 and 8.

**TABLE 7: Survey Results: Reasons for Not Donating to Brevard College**

|   | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Would rather support other organizations in my community      | 3.7%                     | 11.7%           | 47.5%          | 28.4%        | 8.8%                  |
| Don't feel connected to Brevard                               | 17.9%                    | 36.5%           | 29.3%          | 12.0%        | 4.3%                  |
| Believe other organizations need my support more than Brevard | 8.5%                     | 16.5%           | 44.5%          | 24.3%        | 6.1%                  |
| Concerns about the direction Brevard is headed                | 22.4%                    | 28.8%           | 36.1%          | 7.5%         | 5.1%                  |
| Not satisfied with my time at Brevard                         | 50.9%                    | 29.4%           | 14.6%          | 2.7%         | 2.4%                  |

**Table 8: Survey Results: Reasons for Not Donating to Brevard College**

|  | <b>Major Factor</b> | <b>Minor Factor</b> | <b>Not a Factor At All</b> |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Paid enough in tuition   | 12.2%               | 21.7%               | 66.1%                      |
| Don't think the school needs the money                                     | 2.8%                | 16.3%               | 80.9%                      |
| Haven't been given good enough reasons to give                             | 8.8%                | 18.4%               | 72.8%                      |
| Brevard has not done enough to connect with me                             | 14.9%               | 24.1%               | 61.0%                      |
| Feel like donations go into a "black hole"                                 | 7.5%                | 21.2%               | 71.2%                      |
| Feel like a small gift won't make a difference                             | 7.3%                | 22.9%               | 69.9%                      |
| Want my donations to go to a specific purpose and I don't have that option | 10.4%               | 18.4%               | 71.2%                      |
| Don't feel deep emotional connection to the school                         | 9.3%                | 14.8%               | 75.9%                      |
| Prefer to make donations to other organizations                            | 15.1%               | 27.4%               | 57.4%                      |
| Financially unable to donate   | 49.9%               | 21.1%               | 29.1%                      |

## Summary and Practical Significance of Findings

### Hypothesis One: More involved students are more likely to give as alumni.

**Result:** This hypothesis was supported by our findings.

**Summary:** Students who were involved in campus organizations or were organization leaders were more likely to be donors than those that were not involved on campus. In fact, involved students are 13.9 percent more likely to be donors (subject to other controls in the regression model). This may not seem that significant, but the scale for the campus involvement index ranged from 0 to 4 (depth of involvement) and 83 percent of respondents were rated as 0, 1, or 2, so if those 83 percent of respondents increased their involvement by two units, then their likelihood of giving would increase 27.8 percent. The 21 percent of respondents who were rated as 0, could be 41.7 percent more likely to give by increasing their campus involvement by four units! In other words, with so few alumni “topping out” on this scale, there is much room to grow. Therefore, it stands to reason that encouraging student engagement and leadership could be expected to have positive results on future giving behaviors.

### Hypothesis Two: More “fond” memories of Brevard College result in a higher likelihood of giving.

**Result:** This hypothesis was not supported by our findings.

**Summary:** There was not a statistically significant correlation between giving history and the fondness for Brevard index. The regression analysis suggested that a one-unit change in an individual's fondness for Brevard would only increase their likelihood of giving by 0.6 percent.

### Hypothesis Three: Alumni who reported higher satisfaction with their Brevard College experience are also more likely to be donors.

**Result:** The hypothesis was supported by our findings.

**Summary:** Students who scored higher on the positive undergraduate experience index are more likely to be donors. A one-unit increase in a person's average score on the satisfaction scale results in a 14.2 percent greater chance of giving, subject to the controls in our regression model. With 81 percent of respondents scoring between 2 and 4 on the scale (5 = maximum score), there is ample room to increase giving. A two-unit increase in satisfaction score average would result in a 28.4 percent increase likelihood of giving. Satisfaction is an area that the college can have great impact (i.e. faculty quality, supportiveness, uniqueness, and ethics). Gaier (2005) highlights this point, noting that colleges “have the opportunity to greatly influence and control factors that share student perception of the college experience. Thus, through decision making, policies, and shaping the environment, universities can markedly impact the college experience” (p. 280).

**Summary of Findings**

|              | Supported | Not Supported |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| Hypothesis 1 | X         |               |
| Hypothesis 2 |           | X             |
| Hypothesis 3 | X         |               |
| Hypothesis 4 | X         | X             |
| Hypothesis 5 | X         |               |

### **Hypothesis Four: The more engaged and connected an alumni feels to Brevard, the more likely they are to give.**

**Result:** This hypothesis was partially supported by our findings.

**Summary:** Alumni who feel Brevard embodies its mission are 9.9 percent less likely to give to Brevard while for each one point higher an alumnus rated their level of connection to Brevard, their likelihood of donating increased by 15.9 percent. For each one point increase in feelings of responsibility, giving increases by 30.8 percent. The unexpected relationship between mission embodiment and giving could be due to general lack of knowledge about Brevard's mission. These findings are ultimately critical for administrators since these are measures of alumni's current experiences rather than reflections on the past.

### **Hypothesis Five: There are significant differences between two-year and four-year alumni on the three scales and on giving behaviors.**

**Result:** This hypothesis was supported by our findings.

**Summary:** We found statistically significant differences between types of degrees on the campus involvement index and on the fondness for Brevard index, but not on the positive undergraduate experience index. Alumni holding a Bachelor's degree were 14.3 percent more likely to give than alumni holding an associate degree. There are any number of explanations for the relationship between giving behavior and degree. Having more time at an institution allows for the creation of more 'fond' memories. Alumni who earned an associate degree from Brevard and went on to complete a Bachelor's degree elsewhere may feel competing loyalty between their two alma maters. Last, degree earned may be a proxy for income so bachelor's degree holders may have more income and therefore be more likely to make donations.

### **Coming Full Circle**

To respond to our project question, "What personal characteristics contribute to low levels of giving?", our research has allowed us to create the following profile: younger alumni who were not involved in student organizations and were dissatisfied with their student experience (had fewer fond memories) are less likely to be donors. Associate degree recipients are less likely to be donors than Bachelor's degree recipients. We also find that both an alumni's current level of engagement with Brevard and feelings of responsibility to Brevard have a significant impact on their giving behaviors. Each of these findings is highly consistent with the extant literature. Our results have strong practical implications for Brevard College advancement services in how they solicit alumni and for Brevard College as a whole as they consider how to build a pipeline for future donors.

# Project Question II: Friend Raising

## ***“Where There Are Friends, There is Wealth.” - Plautus***

Brevard College relies heavily on tuition and philanthropic support. To remain competitive with other private and public universities, liberal arts colleges are forced to sharply raise salaries and reduce teaching loads, put more pressure on instructional costs, institutional budgets, and the student-faculty ratio that is a distinguishing feature of the liberal arts (Breneman, 1994). Members of the leadership team recognized friends of Brevard tend to give more than alumni. Over the past 11 years, contributions from Brevard friends and alumni comprise almost 27 percent of Brevard’s total giving. Interestingly, Brevard friends gave \$917,046 more than alumni within that time span (internal document, November 4, 2013). Based on these numbers, it appears there is more commitment from the local community rather than alumni who graduated from the institution. The idea that graduates who invested four years of their lives at Brevard College are less committed than people who simply live near the institution is a real concern.

Our project team capitalized on differences in the giving habits of Brevard friends and Brevard alumni. We contemplated several points to guide our study: What inspires friends to give? Why are Brevard friends more inclined to give than alumni? How do the motivations of friends differ from alumni? We first look at the background of the second project question, illustrating the role of philanthropy in higher education followed by the conceptual framework used to guide our inquiry. We then look at the methodology for employing Brevard friends and scheduling interviews. Next, we focus on the analysis portion depicting how the descriptive data is collected and scrutinized. Finally, we explore emergent themes and their correlation to existing literature to uncover the perception of Brevard College from the local community.

## **In This Section**

|                                       |
|---------------------------------------|
| Background                            |
| Conceptual Framework                  |
| Methodology                           |
| Analysis                              |
| Data Analysis for Project Question II |
| Findings                              |
| Discussion                            |

## Background

Philanthropy plays a significant role in higher education. “Philanthropy means a substantial support by foundations, corporations, and private donors for non-profit institutions that provide worthy services or work toward solving significant social problems” (Wolpert, 1993). “Whatever motives animate individual philanthropists, the purpose of philanthropy itself is to promote the welfare, happiness, and culture of mankind” (Bremner, 1988, p. 3). Giving to higher education is best described as philanthropic because the institution is expected to deliver means of instruction and other benefits of education which, in turn, uplifts individuals and society (Cascione, 2003). Brevard College, like many institutions, depends on selfless generosity from individuals.

Cultivating affluent individual donors has been a concern for most non-profit organizations. As a result, many non-profits rely on donor segmentation to better understand their donors. Prince and File (1994) state:

Donor segmentation is the process of classifying the presently undifferentiated group of wealthy individual donors into a small number of groups based on similarities in their views about philanthropy. Donor segmentation allows nonprofit organizations to determine which affluent individual donor segments offer the best potential for long-term and major gift support. (p. 1-2).

Most alumni giving research is based on the analyses of alumni surveys and/or college-level databases (Holmes, 2006), however we decided to bolster our research by investigating the Brevard friends’ perspective as well. Further study deepens our understanding of what encourages giving from local community and what possibly deters giving from the alumni community.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this portion of our study is the Seven Faces of Philanthropy (Prince & File, 1994). We used this research to depict the behaviors of philanthropic donors and frame recommendations for Brevard College to encourage and increase contributions from their local community. The Seven Faces research syndicates all attitudinal and motivational variables identified from preexisting research, and creates an unprecedented large data set of wealthy donors that grants opportunities for quantitative analysis when applicable. Prince and File (1994) group philanthropic donors into seven categories based on their motivations to give.

The Seven Faces research is grounded in a surplus of nascent existing literature. The donor segmentation approach is derived from studies of small donor practices that contribute to United Way campaigns (Harvey, 1990; Guy & Patton, 1988; Smith, 1990) and philanthropic patterns that emerged over time in the U.S. economy (Weisbrod, 1988; Jencks, 1987). Donor self-descriptions of their motivations and interests transpire from a study of twenty individuals who give more than a million dollars in a year (Panus, 1984). And donor preferences for involvement

### Seven Faces of Philanthropy

- **The Communitarian:** Doing good makes good sense
- **The Devout:** Doing good is God’s will
- **The Investor:** Doing good is good business
- **The Socialite:** Doing good is fun
- **The Altruist:** Doing good feels right
- **The Repayer:** Doing good in return
- **The Dynast:** Doing good is a family tradition.

with non-profits emerge from Schervish and Herman's (1988) study that explores long-term strategies donors choose in interacting with non-profits.

## Methodology

We decided personal contact with friends of Brevard College would be the best approach for this qualitative portion of our study. Brevard explained the most consistent, reliable donors were friends within the local community.

### Our Initial Plan

For convenience and efficiency sake, our team originally planned to conduct focus groups with local friends. We would prepare open-ended questions in advance to discover what influenced and inspired friends' giving. We believed this method would allow us to collect sufficient data from several community members at one time. Focus groups would consist of two to four community members depending on how many friends participated. Each member of our project team was prepared to serve as the moderator who would present questions, keep the conversation moving, and intervene to bring the conversation back to the core topic when necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### Our Revised Approach

For safe measure we consulted experts in the field of qualitative study and education research. Based on their advice we discarded the idea of using focus groups because "we could receive socially negotiated answers from focus groups" (J. Braxton, personal communication, July 17, 2013). Patton (2002) explains focus groups also have certain limitations that could obstruct the quality of our study. The number of questions is greatly restricted in a group setting and focus groups tend to be dominated by one or two people which exclude input from every individual. Based on these limitations, we decided to communicate with friends through one-on-one interviews to gather authentic and unbiased responses.

A major way qualitative researchers seek to understand perceptions, feelings, and knowledge of people is through in-depth, intensive interviewing (Patton, 2002). Our project team followed the standardized open-ended interview approach which "consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each responded the same questions with essentially the same words (Patton, 2002, p. 342). Patton (2002) explains this method presents several benefits: the exact instrument used is available for inspection by others who use the findings from our study, variation among interviewers is minimized, the interview is highly focused and time efficient, and analysis is facilitated because responses are easy to find and compare.

We devised three categories of interest based on our observations of Brevard College and discussion with the Brevard leadership team: engagement, image perception, and giving. These categories were also selected to mirror the parallel categories used in our alumni survey. Under each category we created a list of questions associated with the each category. Questions were created with inspiration from similar questionnaires and tailored to the interests of Brevard (Ahern & Joyaux, 2007; Non-Profit Quarterly, 2013). We presented the interview questions to Susan Cothorn, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, to ensure the questions targeted the interests of Brevard. Upon her approval, we finalized the questions for future one-on-one interviews (see Brevard Friends Interview Questions in Appendix B).



We requested to interview friends who gave within the past five years. Susan Cothorn arranged for us to interview Brevard friends that were selected based on their availability and good standing with Brevard College. All three members of our project team conducted five to seven one-on-one interviews with friends. We interviewed a total of 18 Brevard friends: thirteen White males and five White females. The majority of friends are transferred retirees and three are past professors or staff members of Brevard College. Interviews lasted an average of 25 minutes and were recorded, notated, and conducted in person or via phone.

## Analysis for Project Question II

We used investigator triangulation and a content analysis approach to identify emergent themes and patterns (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002). Investigator triangulation – the use of several different evaluators – enabled us to test the consistency of the emergent themes. Content analysis is a technique in qualitative study that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core constituencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). According to this method of analysis, we organized our findings using a concept-clustered matrix. Interview matrices enable researchers to organize narrative data into succinct patterns, themes, and relationships (C. Smreker, personal communication, November 9, 2012). Each interviewer followed a five-step process to analyze each interview and create matrices. First, we simply listened to the interview. Second, we listened to the interview again to look for patterns such as common responses to questions regarding engagement, image perception, or giving to Brevard College. Third, we extrapolated any illustrative quotes. Then, we developed a matrix for each interviewee and filled it out according to several emergent themes. Finally, we combined the matrices across all three interviewers. See Figure 9 for a Sample Matrix.

**Figure 9: Sample Matrix for Brevard College Friend Interview**

|        |                          |   |
|--------|--------------------------|---|
|        | GEORGE                   | -Has a scholarship that he has endowed; In Brevard for 14 years; came here to retire; Rates involvement as a 5  |
| THEMES | Face of a Tornado:       |   |
|        | Mountains & Valleys:     | Outdoor program and fine arts programs are its key strengths<br>-The direct engagement with The community seems to have gone away during The past few years<br>-Outdoor program and fine arts programs are its key strengths<br>-The direct engagement with the community seems to have gone away during the past few years |
|        | Making a Shift:          |   |
|        | Positive New Leadership: | I met The President and know him fairly well<br>- "He's made a great start. Certainly has The college excited about what it is doing and where it is going to."   |
|        | We Go Hand-in-Hand:      | The college is a really big asset for The community<br>- "This community would have a hole in it If it weren't for The college"<br>- a community like this needs to have a presence of higher education in The town   |
|        | Why I Give:              | The school is incredibly important to The town<br>- If The school is going to be a vital part of The community it needs to be good.<br>- "So I give to The school that it can be here and be good, not just be here."<br><b>Communitarian</b>   |
|        | Experiential Education:  | Essentially a liberal arts school, functioning at a high level<br>- "I think it's doing better at achieving the mission as it increases its enrollment."<br>- Outdoor and wilderness education are important to the institution's success   |

Several themes emerged from our interviews. We initially had nine thematic categories. After we compared the themes and our matrices with one another we recognized some overlap in the responses. As a result, one member combined a few categories based on our group delineation and settled on the following themes:

- Mountains and Valleys: Strengths and Weaknesses of Brevard
- Face of a Tornado: Student Characteristics
- Making a Shift: Effects of the Transition
- Positive New Leadership: Opinions about Administration
- We Go Hand-in-Hand: Interactions with the Community
- Why I Give: Donor Motivations
- Experiential Education: Perception of Brevard Mission

## Findings

The findings from the interviews are extremely telling. Friends of Brevard College certainly value the institution and share a deep appreciation for the administration, faculty, and students. Not only do their responses illuminate how Brevard College is viewed within the community, they also reveal ways for Brevard College to encourage and possibly increase their giving.

### Mountains and Valleys

**Mountains: Strengths.** Brevard friends applaud the college for its various strengths. Two main strengths that emerged are the size of Brevard and its faculty. The size of the institution creates an intellectually intimate atmosphere that is conducive for learning. For example, small class sizes provide opportunities for students to thrive with one-on-one interaction with faculty. One friend shares, “The small setting allows it to be a big family. Students feel involved and get personal attention” while another remarks, “Students can’t be anonymous even if they want to.” Friends also believe the size of Brevard makes it easier to make adjustments to increase productivity, enrollment, and quality of life than it is at a very large college.

“The small setting allows it to be a big family. Students feel involved and get personal attention”

Friends recognize faculty as a true asset to Brevard. Friends describe the faculty as dedicated, selfless, and willing to work regardless of the marginal salary. Why? Simply because they love Brevard and the area in which it resides. Faculty need to be revered and encouraged because “the success of [Brevard] rests on the shoulders of the faculty.” Faculty reside at the very core of the enterprise and the extent to which higher education is effective (or not) in accomplishing its missions turns on the quality of the faculty (Schuster, 2011). Born and raised in Brevard, Valerie suggests:

If you want good people here to teach and be educators, you have to be taking care of them one way or another. Either through their benefits or through their pay. You know as well as I do that people go where they are appreciated and taken care of. Sometimes it doesn’t take a pay incentive, but just to be singled out, and a pat on the back occasionally

goes a long way. That [makes] you feel like you're important and you're doing a good job-- people will stay for that for a long time.

Other strengths of Brevard are the outdoors environment and the music program. Students, faculty, and residents migrate towards Brevard for the beautiful setting, location, and recreational opportunities. Moreover, friends in the community cherish the two significant performing arts centers on the Eastern Seaboard – one being Carnegie Hall and the other is the Porter Center at Brevard College.

**Valleys: Weaknesses.** According to the community, Brevard College struggles to maintain their funding and facilities. Friends believe Brevard only has enough funds to take care of the absolute essentials. “That’s just the way it is, when you’re a small, non-profit place – there are a lot of things they need to do but they can’t do them without funding. So fundraising becomes so important,” one friend suggests. It’s common knowledge that the postsecondary system thrives from tuition, but increasing the number of students does not always benefit a small liberal arts college like Brevard. “Increasing enrollment is a double-edged sword,” Tonya explains, “if we got too big it would lose that edge. Instead I would like to see success as additional resources to fine tune the very quality of smallness rather than making Brevard bigger.”

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The facilities are, by far, the most apparent disadvantage to Brevard College. Almost every friend we interviewed mentions the inadequacy of the facilities. Very few, however, attribute this flaw toward Brevard itself; it is a shortcoming due to the lack of funds rather than an institutional oversight. Either way, the community holds a critical eye on the facilities. The facilities – especially freshmen dorms with cracked walls and classrooms without air condition in the dead of August heat – cast a negative shadow over Brevard. Valerie states “as a parent, first impression is important. If it’s neat, clean and up-to-date on the outside, I bet they have their act together on the inside, too. I just see a lot of areas it’s deteriorated and that just gives me a lot of concern.”

### Face of a Tornado

A general consensus among friends is that students are spinning in the right direction to uphold the responsibility of being a Brevard College Tornado. The students enter more academically prepared, are more engaged in the classroom, and more committed to learning even beyond graduation. Although several friends mention student athletes do not always fit into the culture, many agree with Benjamin that “the students enjoy getting help, they enjoy getting advice, they enjoy helping to prepare themselves to graduate and face life after school.”

### A Shift in the Dark

Friends’ sentiments align exactly with the concerns of Brevard faculty and staff in regards to the transition from a two-year to four-year institution. Friends believe the transition happened hastily under poor leadership, and Brevard was practically forced to transition because the economy and philosophy of education changed

for postsecondary institutions. “They were pressured into going into it. I don't think they had a choice. But they had a choice in having some better presidents than they had!”

Friends also suggest the alumni base is more restricted due to the transition. Brevard struggles to maintain financial support from its alumni for two main reasons – first, it is difficult to raise money from two-year graduates who received a bachelor's degree elsewhere because their loyalty rests with two separate institutions, and Brevard simply does not have an abundant amount of four-year alumni.

Interestingly, some suggest Brevard had more of a purpose as a two-year institution. “When the school transitioned it lost its cache.” “I thought we served a purpose as a two year school because we had so many students who came here who probably would never have made it going to a big school.” Even still, as Brevard continues to develop and redefine its purpose as a four-year liberal arts college, Brevard seems to be making strides in spite of the timorous transition. “A lot of us did not think it was such a hot idea [to transition], and I'm really glad to see it has progressed better than some of us thought it would.”

### **Murky Mission**

The mission of Brevard College is not collectively understood among friends. As a reminder, Brevard College's statement reads: Brevard College is committed to an experiential liberal arts education that encourages personal growth and inspires artistic, intellectual and social action. Most make positive assumptions, but the majority of friends only identify a portion of the mission. When asked to articulate what friends perceive the Brevard mission statement to be, we received a plethora of responses:

- “To provide a small town experience, good education, and environmental focus.”
- “To provide students with a good economic package to attend college.”
- “The mission is to provide its students with knowledge and skills to go out into society to be good citizens and hold gainful employment...as it should be for any college.”
- “To provide an experiential education for students.”
- “I'd like to think they are busy educating young people.”

Although the mission is reasonably implied within these responses, very few friends hit the nail on the head. Some frankly state they are unaware of what the mission is. At best, some throw out the key phrase ‘experiential education,’ but struggle to articulate what the term really means. Robert says, “Everyone I ask has a different definition” while his wife has a similar, yet more passionate response, “That's something I've struggled with. They keep popping out the word “experiential,” but people have a different spin on it. By people I mean the faculty and administration. There isn't a clear mission and that's a real problem for me.”

### **I'm a David Joyce Fan**

The current president, Dr. David Joyce, holds an immaculate report with friends of Brevard College. Friends unanimously applaud Dr. Joyce for his upbeat, enthusiastic personality and his positive impact on Brevard. “He's made a great start. Certainly has the college excited about what it is doing and where it is going to” one friend exclaims while another shares, “David has done a masterful job at focusing us all on the mission – to the students and the community.” Dr. Joyce continues to astound the community with his innovative ideas that connect Brevard to the local community. Friends express that because of him there is a positive new energy about Brevard that is almost palpable.

Several times friends mention the saga about the gates. One of the first things Dr. Joyce did once he became president was to tear down the big, metal gates that guarded the entrance to Brevard College. Tearing down the gates was “a manifestation of Brevard being more welcoming to the community,” Peter eloquently explains.

Still others respect Dr. Joyce for taking on the responsibilities of keeping “a fragile ship” afloat. Friends perceive the transition from a two-year to four-year college as a difficult time for Brevard because it happened hastily with little guidance. Some friends explain the economy and whole philosophy of education was changing during that time, so Brevard was practically forced to change in order to survive. Unfortunately, the transition happened under poor leadership as well. Apparently the past president was considered an “isolationist” who pushed Brevard to change. One friend states, “The past president [prior to Dr. David Joyce] was a square peg in a round hole at Brevard.”

Whether the hastiness of the transition was due to poor leadership or a driving economy, friends view the current president as a light at the end of the tunnel. Walking into a struggling school certainly was not easy, but friends believe Dr. Joyce is a dynamic president that is right for the job. “The new president is a breath of fresh air.” “He’s a man of his word.” “I take my hat off to David Joyce. He’s made a big difference with his team since he’s come.” Based on these findings, strong leadership is a definite strength of Brevard College. Dr. Joyce is a true organizational hero.

The new president is a breath of fresh air.”  
 “He’s a man of his word.” “I take my hat off to David Joyce. He’s made a big difference with his team since he’s come.”

### **A Feather in the Town’s Cap**

Brevard friends view the College as the bulwark of the town. They explain Brevard adds so much to the community financially, aesthetically, and in general. “There’s a vibrancy that the College brings to the place.” Many credit the institution as being one of the main, if not the largest, employer in the Transylvania County. Leonard, a retiree since 1994, remembers when the Mud Bowl hit during a rainy season. Typically Brevard pays rent to play football games in the high school stadium. One year Brevard played the game in the mud. It was so unsafe for players that the following year the coach moved the team to Asheville for a year. During that year an economic group did a study on the impact Brevard College football had on Brevard and determined that the football team contributed about \$200,000 of economic activity just with those five or six home games. This is just one example of how “the institution is part of the county’s economic and cultural make-up. Brevard plays a super-role in providing for the quality of life for people in the community. It’s a blessing and a benefit.”

On average friends perceive Brevard College makes moderate effort in reaching out to the community. Some are unsure of Brevard’s efforts to connect with the community while others believe Brevard makes satisfactory attempts, but they can always improve. Brevard connects with the town through various forms of communication such as newsletters, emails, campus events, and various clubs and programs. Regardless of

the College's efforts, Brevard friends recognize the current forms of communication may not always be as effective because of the great divide within the community.

Among the residents that were born and raised in Brevard and the retirees, there are two groups of people: those that see the importance of Brevard and those that do not. One friend shares when people relocate he asks them what led them to Brevard and the College is always one of the top reasons. But not everyone respects the institution in the same regard. Friends believe if the community knew more about the Brevard College, others would be more inclined to donate their dollars and time. Rebecca, a Professor Emerita of Brevard and current retiree, acknowledges Brevard College as the "last bastion for the town, but the community needs to be educated about that."

### Why I Give

There is a consistency in responses when friends explain their motives to give. Friends contribute for mainly two reasons – to help the community succeed and/or to give back to the place that made such a difference in their own lives. It is very common for retirees to invest in the community because they distinguish Brevard College as a key point of revenue. Jasper came to Brevard 14 years ago to retire and says, "This town would have a hole in it if it weren't for the college." Ben moved to Brevard two years ago with his wife. They meet once a week with a small group of neighborhood retirees to volunteer their time at Brevard College. "None of us went to Brevard, but as a community, we take a lot of interest in the college. We're bridging the gap until the College has more time down the road to fill out."

"This town would have a hole in it if it weren't for the college."

Still others give because, "It's all entirely about the kids. You have great kids with great promise, and if you can help the kids out that's what it's all about. I really enjoy engaging with the kids." A legacy of Brevard shares, "The key for me is this – this place was good for me and very good to me. I could have gone lots of place but I wasn't ready to get out into the wide world."

Brevard friends truly revere the institution for what it has been for students, what it is to the community, and what it will be for the future. That alone inspires them to give. Some give of their time while others will write a check. No matter the size or form of the donation, there's a sense of gratitude and appreciation among friends. As Jake authentically states, "If you give a gift of \$1,000 to a school like Auburn it doesn't mean anything. But give a \$1,000 gift here? Susan will come over and give you a big hug!"

### Discussion

Research bolsters these findings. Some of the insights were expected and others were surprising. These findings and extant literature illustrate Brevard College from an external and scholarly viewpoint.

Bolman and Deal (2013) explain culture within an organization is both a product and a process. Culture is a product that embodies wisdom from an accumulated experience. Culture is a process that is renewed and recreated when novices learn the old and new ways to eventually become teachers themselves. Based on these findings Brevard excels in its representation of "culture as a product," but falls short on its representation of "culture as a process." By chance, there is a general consensus about what Brevard

College is to the community. Although friends recognize Brevard as an essential financial asset to the town that represents intellectual growth and opportunity, this image occurs haphazardly rather than strategically. As a result, Brevard cannot purposefully justify or influence behaviors of friend and alumni giving.

Ultimately, these findings epitomize donor profiles described in the Seven Faces of Philosophy (Prince & File, 1994). The majority of Brevard friends fit the description of Communitarians and Repayers while a few friends represent the qualities of Investors and Socialites.

### Four Faces of Philanthropy Present at Brevard

- **The Communitarian:** Doing good makes good sense
- **The Repayer:** Doing good in return
- **The Investor:** Doing good is good business
- **The Socialite:** Doing good is fun

Communitarians want to give back to their communities. They strongly focus on the environment around them and people involved within that environment. Communitarians recognize the advantages the community has to offer and aspire to maintain these advantages for other in the community. Communitarians also give because it just makes good sense. They are deep rooted and have a strong psychological bond to their environment, a bond they intend to reinforce. “Further cementing local relationships with philanthropic activities makes good business sense as well as good personal sense” to Communitarians (Prince & File, 1994, p. 21).

Unlike Communitarians, Repayers give out of gratitude. Repayers feel entitled to give back because a non-profit personally benefited them in some way. Repayers exemplify how a dramatic stimulus or life-changing event inspires philanthropic behavior. A change in economic status due to the education they received in college or receiving medical care after a traumatic accident constitute as stimuli that trigger philanthropy. It is important to note that unlike any other philanthropic personality, Repayers benefit first from the non-profit organization before they become a donor.

Most of the Brevard friends we interviewed fall under the Communitarian profile. Friends’ involvement ranged from being retirees in the town as members of the Board of Visitors to being strong political figures in the community. The Brevard Communitarians want others in the community to succeed: “I give because I believe in the youth. Brevard College needs to get people to know the students. Once they know students they will want to help support Brevard.” Other Communitarians give because they recognize the College as an economic engine that funnels back to the community. Victor, a donor born and raised in Brevard, says, “It’s an absolute necessity that the community stays involved with the College because it’s a win-win.”

Alumni fall under the category of Repayers. Because they have a specific motivation based on their felt obligation, Repayers tend to support fewer non-profit organizations, but Repayers can be extremely devout to educational institutions where they received education they credit with their success. A perfect example is a friend who was able to graduate high school because of Brevard’s dual-enrollment program in Math. If it were not for the dual-enrollment program this Brevard friend may never have attended Brevard College. Currently, he is the Mayor of Brevard. The only disadvantage for non-profits is Repayers’ wealth emerges rather late in their lives, therefore their philanthropy to higher education is delayed. It takes a while for a

Repayer to reap the benefits from their involvement at Brevard College. Over time, and if their college experience is truly life-changing, Repayers find a way to give back.

A few Brevard friends resemble the characteristics of Socialites and Investors. Socialites prefer a particular social milieu as their philanthropic platform. Their philanthropy welcomes them into the social arena and allows them to express their personality in a way that is befitting to them. Tonya, for example, is a Friend of Fine Arts who plans events such as their upcoming “Love of the Arts” Fine Arts Gala. She also co-chairs the Brevard international program where she coordinates host parents for international students and recreational activities such as zip lining, hikes, and bowling to acclimate students to their new environment.

Investors, on the other hand, do not relish in the social interaction. “Investors give because they are financially able to do so, because they have a personal desire to do good works, and because they possess enough business acumen to give in a businesslike way” (Prince & File, 1994, p. 44). They are very much “results-driven” and analyze their non-profit contributions as they would any other investment. When asked how philanthropic contributions make a difference, Raymond says “We’re seeing more students. This is the most students we’ve had since we were a two-year college.”

Knowing the profiles of donors enables non-profits to utilize their resources more efficiently. The theoretical framework of the Seven Faces of Philanthropy allows Brevard to pinpoint what types of friends donate, why they choose to give, and what encourages them to increase their giving.



# Project Question III: Benchmarking

The transition to a four-year college still figures prominently into the affairs of Brevard College today. Specifically, the college approached Vanderbilt to help ascertain a set of benchmarks to use in evaluating its progress since the transition in 1995. Talking with members of the Brevard College leadership team led us to the conclusion that benchmarking has more than one meaning for the college. As such, the third project question focuses on a benchmarking analysis in two senses of the word. The first element of the analysis attempts to construct an appropriate peer group against which Brevard College can benchmark itself, the key commonality being appropriately-sized institutions who themselves have endured a two-to-four year transition. The second prong of the analysis, following from the first, has to do with what measures, both descriptive and analytical, Brevard College ought to employ for comparing themselves to the newly constructed benchmark group. Said differently, this prong of the analysis seeks to establish a set of best practices for institutions attempting to develop giving relationships with sets of alumni from a school with the same name but differing missions.

This section of our project walks through the approach we used to develop both a useful benchmarking comparison group and an appropriate set of best practices for Brevard College derived from interviews with a series of individuals at the comparison institutions. We first look a bit closer at the background of the third project question, explaining why such an analysis is necessary. We then outline the methodology for constructing the peer group and the approach utilized to produce a set of best practices. Our analysis results in both defining the final peer group for use and creating a thematic set of best practices for Brevard College to use in self-assessment. Finally, we look to summarize salient findings and identify key limitations to our work before raising questions that remain unconsidered in this area of practice.

## In This Section

Background

Methodology: Developing a Comparator Group

Methodology: Discovering Best Practices

Analysis for Project Question III: Comparator Group Indicators and Best Practices

Findings

Questions Outstanding

## Background

Searching for appropriate and relevant literature on institutional shifts in mission results in a host of different studies, none of which speak to the specificity of Brevard College's challenge. Within the institutional advancement literature, there is a dearth of information that speaks to either best practices in working with a divided alumni population – a population where a subset of alumni graduated from a two-year college while another subset graduated from a four-year college.

Brevard College's small size, tuition dependence, and Appalachian footprint further complicate locating appropriate research. The extant literature lacks generalizability to a school with the distinctiveness of Brevard College. As such, there is little certainty in how to measure progress. Succinctly, such a situation results in a condition of anomie—Brevard College manages through the transition from a two-year to a four-year college with little idea of educational norms or standards (Hermanowicz, 2011; Merton, 1938).

Given these conditions, we deemed it appropriate to reach out to other similarly-situated institutions to gain a better sense of the landscape for institutions that had experienced a mission transition. We wanted to determine: (1) whether practices existed in this realm that were common across institutions and (2) what those practices would be useful as best practices for colleges like Brevard as they pertain to working with segmented alumni populations.

## Methodology: Developing a Comparator Group

In its previous work with its students, Brevard College identified a series of colleges that it considered to be appropriate referents. Similarly, Brevard College, as most colleges have, had identified a group of aspirant peers – institutions to which they aspired to mimic in terms of programmatic offerings, student and faculty demographics, and ultimately, markers of prestige (Kezar & Eckel, 2011).

The most critical element in constructing the comparator group for this project, however, rested in accurately identifying the best institutional field in which to situate Brevard College (Fligstein, 1997; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). The methodological approach to peer group construction suggests that a variety of institutional factors ought to be considered when including or excluding a school from a group—enrollment, size of institutional endowment, the presence of athletics, or geography represent a small sample of the types of attributes to consider (Martin & Sauvageot, 2011). Best practices in peer group design suggest a reverse-engineering approach; clarifying the uses of the peer group before constructing it produces a more useful set of schools upon which one can compare.

Drawing from the field of new institutionalism (Fligstein, 1997; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008), we wanted to ensure that the final group of institutions we invited to participate in the study was not only appropriate comparators for Brevard College but also likely to contribute to best practices in development and alumni affairs at small colleges. A series of conversations with Brevard College leadership led us to a decision about what were the most important facets to consider when constructing a comparison group. Given Brevard College's request for insight into measuring its progress since the institution's shift in mission, a focal point of the peer group design became isolating institutions that had experienced a similar mission transition. Moreover, issues around regional distinctiveness also proved to be of interest to Brevard College, given its

recruiting footprint and powerful connection with the town of Brevard and Transylvania County. Finally, ensuring that institutions were of the correct scale, specifically in terms of financial metrics, was a final consideration.

In the end, we employed the following three criteria for selecting institutions, each more restrictive than the previous:

- Institutions needed to belong to the Appalachian College Consortium, given the distinctiveness of the schools within this region
- Institutions needed to have experienced a similar two to four year transition in academic program offering
- Institutions needed to be comparably sized; tuition-dependent liberal arts colleges

### Criteria 1: Appalachian College Consortium

Founded in 1990 as a result of several long-standing institutional grants, the Appalachian College Consortium has as its charge to “Develop and share ideas, information, programs and resources to achieve its goals, which include promoting cooperation and collaboration among its member institutions to serve the people of Appalachia through higher education and related services”(Appalachian College Association Website). Originally founded as a clearinghouse for professional development of faculty employed by small Appalachian institutions, the Consortium has now grown to encompass 36 institutions across seven states. Today, membership within the Consortium grants members access to information about academia in the region. Its most recent annual report focuses the attention of institutions within the Consortium on the rapidly shifting demographics in the region, calling upon all of its members to reconsider their educational practices to reflect those shifts.

Given the unique connection of Brevard College to its Appalachian heritage, coupled with the school's commitment to educate citizens of Appalachia, we opted to use membership in this Consortium as a marker for inclusion in the comparison group, the first criteria enumerated above. Institutions like Brevard College closely monitor their environments for a number of reasons; the historical inequities in Appalachian socioeconomic status along with the erosion of the industrial economy of the region render education an enterprise potentially beyond the reach of the region's residents (Bourdieu, 1977; Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). These schools are indeed distinctive -- how does an institution engender a sense of philanthropy in such an area? As such, membership becomes the key criterion for inclusion in the peer group.

### Criteria 2: Transition

From the Consortium's membership roll, we looked at each institution's history on their website. We looked for a mention of a two-to-four year transition, similar to that of Brevard College. Though it stands to reason that many, if not all, institutions in the Consortium have expanded their degree offerings over their lifespan, we deemed it necessary to include only those institutions that explicitly marked a transition with a specific year. This criterion narrowed our potential peer group from the original 36 members to 11.

### Criteria 3: Institutional Profile

Rather than a strict delimiter to inclusion in the peer group, the final criterion called for developing a context for institutions that had met the previously described criteria. Essentially, did individual colleges that had both established membership in the Appalachian College Consortium and transitioned from two to four year degree offerings have a similar institutional profile to that of Brevard College? What we looked for were key indicators of comparability in both enrollment and financial metrics. Also, we looked at available indicators that spoke to directly to institutional advancement. Ultimately, this methodological step served as our attempt to minimize threats to generalizability (Patton, 2002).

### Final Comparator Group

The institutional field analysis we completed resulted in 11 potential institutions for participation:

- Alice Lloyd College
- Bluefield College
- Ferrum College
- Lees-McRae College
- Lindsey Wilson College
- Mars Hill College
- Montreat College
- University of Pikeville
- Virginia Intermont College
- Warren Wilson College
- Young Harris College

## Methodology: Discovering Best Practices

Once we determined the set of institutions to use for a comparison group, we set out to confirm each institution's participation in the benchmarking study. Rather than relying on a network of contacts at each of the colleges, we gathered contact information for both the Vice President / Director of Advancement at each school as well as the Director of Alumni Relations. Given the nature of the best practices that we anticipate sharing with Brevard College, we determined that these were the two best points of contact with the institutions. The Vice President/Director level will have knowledge of the broader institutional strategy around development. More this individual will likely understand how institutional development interfaces with other college units. The Director of Alumni Relations will have knowledge of day-to-day alumni engagement, specific strategies for working with different cohorts of alumni, and practical knowledge essential to our discovery of best practices for Brevard College.

We sent an electronic communication to each set of individuals at the 11 institutions targeted in January 2014. The request for participation included text similar to that of our alumni engagement survey; an outline of the nature of the study, the connection to Vanderbilt University, and Brevard College's explicitly stated purposes of the work were all embedded within the communication. In addition, we summarized the nature of the conversation that we were planning to have with each individual at the institution. Finally, we shared logistical details about participation – suggesting time frames for participation, time commitments necessary

to participate, and ensuring anonymity and/or sanitization of data if needed by the institution. As a means of encouraging participation in the study, we also shared with the potential targets that we would make the data available in a summary report to be shared in April 2014. We also plan to conduct a conference call with any interested participants to share our results and entertain a discussion and potential further research around the issues in question. A second round of communication was sent two weeks following the initial e-mail to maximize participation. A copy of the request for participation can be found in the Appendix C.

Of the 11 institutions who met each of the three criteria, seven institutions agreed to participate in the study. Once the group of seven comparison institutions had given their consent to be included in the study, we finalized 30-minute phone appointments to talk with either one or both of the targeted participants: the Vice President of Advancement and/or the Director of Alumni Relations. Each of these phone conversations were recorded so that we could revisit the conversations for subsequent analysis. Rather than a set of scripted questions to ask in sequential order, we utilized a semi-structured, discovery-oriented guide for building understanding exploring and in-the-field best practices (Alstete, 1995; Patton, 2002). Below is a set of eight themes we probed. Each is based upon practitioner-based advancement literature along with conversations with the areas that Brevard College leadership wanted to explore (Ahern & Joyaux, 2007; CASE Research Brief).

- Definition of Alumni Standing
- Nature and Scope of Alumni Outreach
- Institutional Metrics used to Measure Success
- Presence and Organization of a Functioning Alumni Board
- Development / Alumni Linkages to Other Parts of the Institution
- The Role of Friends of the College
- General Best Practices to Working with Alumni
- Additional Areas of Institutional Interest

The full interview protocol for the benchmarking project can be viewed in Appendix D. Together, these themes allowed for us to conduct a thematic analysis, looking for consistencies in practice between and among institutions. Each of the themes was listed in a qualitative-style content analysis matrix. Phone conversations were coded into the matrix to look for emerging best practices (Smrekar, 2012).

## **Analysis of the Comparator Group**

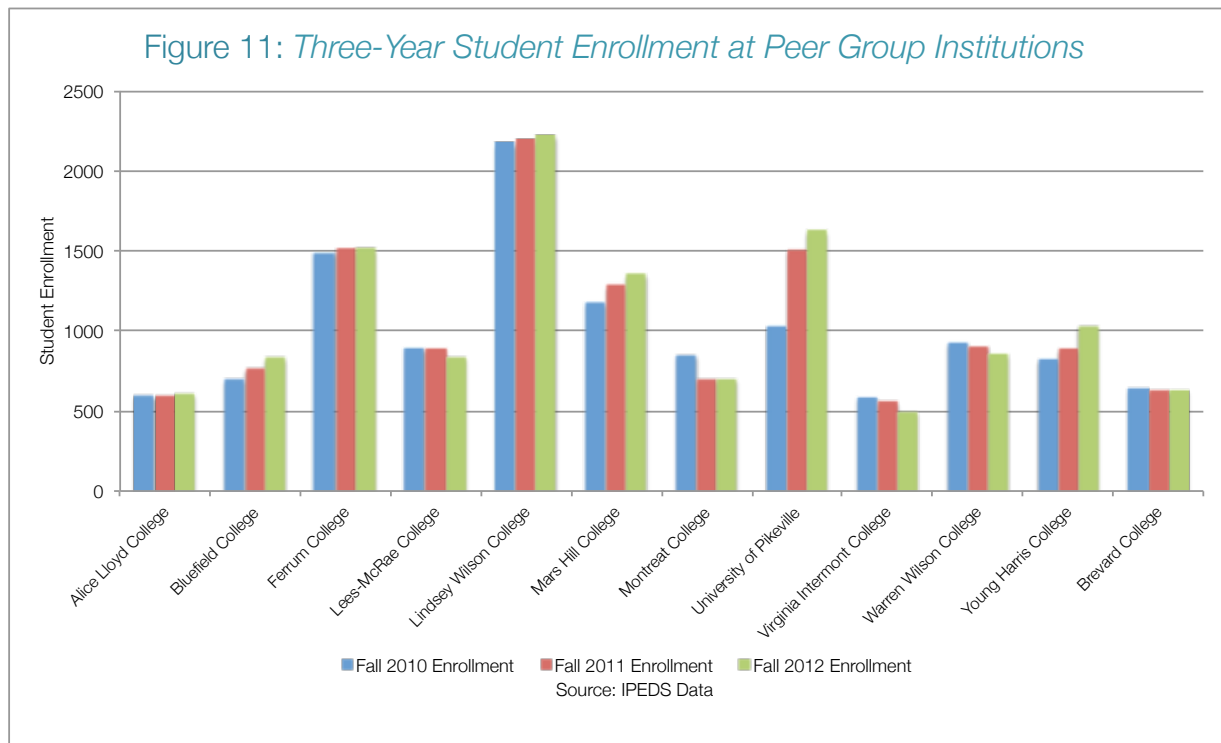
In order to strengthen external validity for the best practices deduced, we have conducted a three-pronged analysis of the 11 institutions included in the Brevard College benchmark group. Though only seven of the 11 institutions elected to participate in the study, we felt it important to gather data from all 11 institutions who matched each of the three criteria put forth earlier. We first examined enrollment metrics to provide context for the scope, size, and selectivity of the colleges. We then examined markers of financial health and complexity to determine relative comparability of the institutions included in the study. Finally, we looked at metrics specific to the institutional advancement domain – annual private gift revenue and the value of the institution’s endowment. Across each indicator, we report Brevard’s relation to the median and provide

interquartile ranges where appropriate; the spread of the data necessitates looking at the range of data given institutional outliers.

### Enrollment Indicators

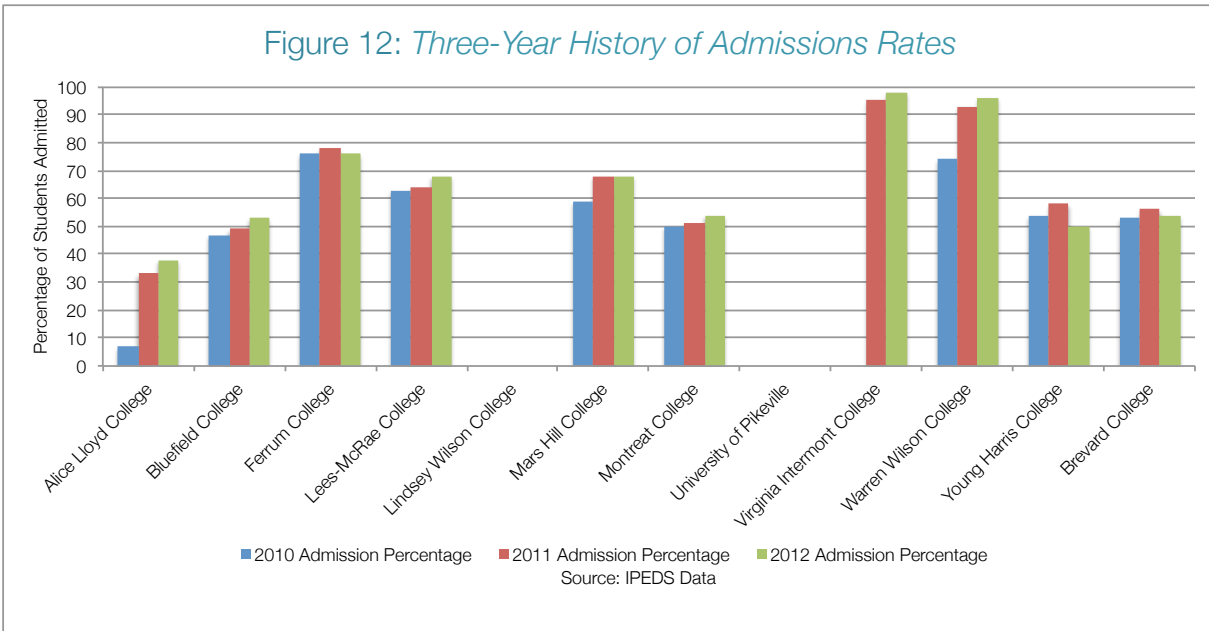
Pragmatically, reviewing an institution’s admissions rate, size of its student population, and retention measures can be likened to an input-throughput-output form of logic. Alumni relations and institutional advancement in part hinge upon the success of an institution admitting, educating, and graduating future alumni. As such, we gathered the three most recent years of data on institutions in the peer group.

With regard to institutional size, most of the institutions within the peer group have failed to pass through the 1,000 student threshold for which Brevard College has long aimed. The University of Pikeville, which experienced yet another institutional transition in 2013 (to offer Master’s Degrees), is the largest institution in the peer group (1,620 students) followed by Ferrum College (1,510 students). Brevard College is consistently among the smallest institutions; in 2012, Brevard College was in the 13th percentile of the peer group based upon student enrollment. See Figure 11 for a pictorial representation of the data.

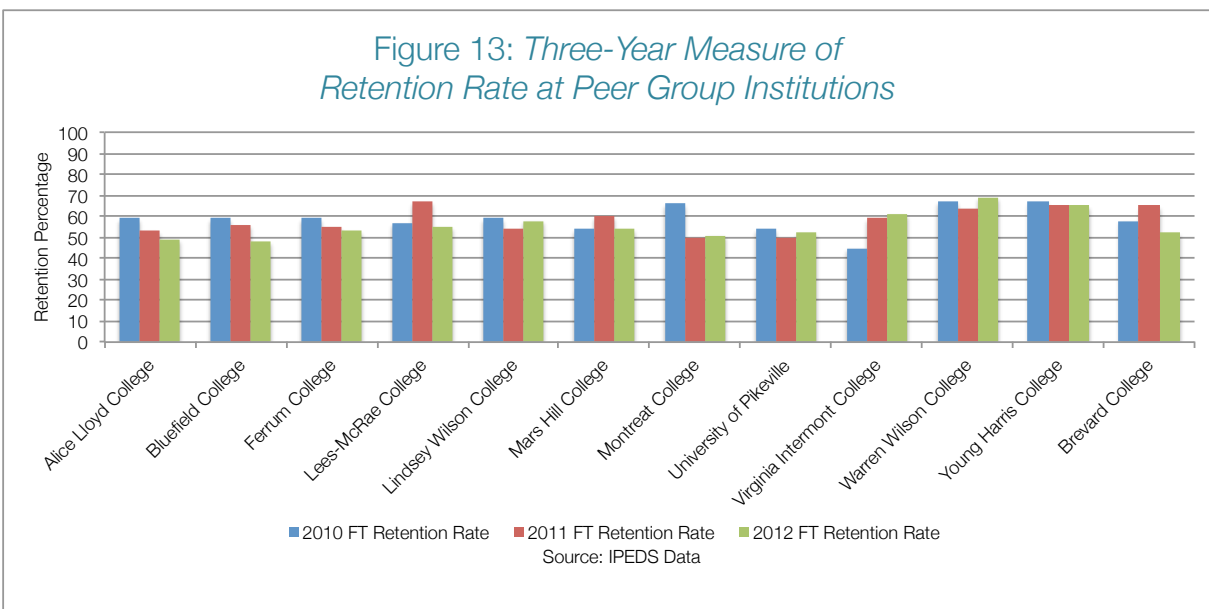


Most institutions included in the peer group appeared to have a fairly selective admissions policy. For the peer group, the median acceptance rate in 2010 was 56.5 percent. A year later, the median percentage had increased to 64 percent. Again in 2012, the median percentage increased an additional 4 percent to 68 percent. Though we have not included a hypothesis about the increasing rates of admissions, it stands to reason that in the years following the 2008 economic downturn, colleges in the comparator group appeared to have relaxed their admissions standards to ease enrollment management concerns. Despite admitting

more than half of its applicants, Brevard College is more selective than many of the institutions included within the peer group. See Figure 12 for a pictorial representation of the data.



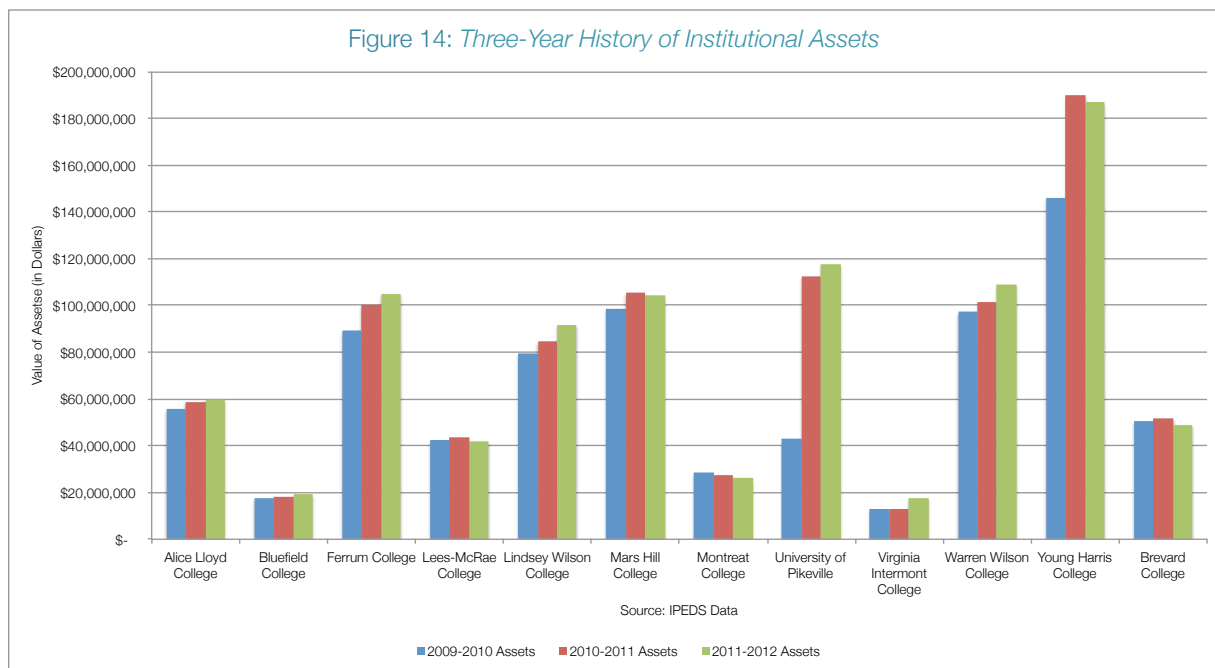
First to second year retention rates for colleges within the peer group appear to be on the decline across the three-year period. The median retention rates for the 11 institutions were 59 percent in 2010, 56 percent in 2011, and 54 percent in 2012. Only Warren Wilson College was able to build upon its retention rate across the three years. Initially, Brevard College cited its low retention rate as a cause for concern. In two of the three years for which data was collected, this appears to be a legitimate concern. In 2010 and again in 2012, Brevard College was below the 35th percentile of the 11-college group for retention rates. Figure 13 presents a pictorial representation of the data.



## Financial Indicators

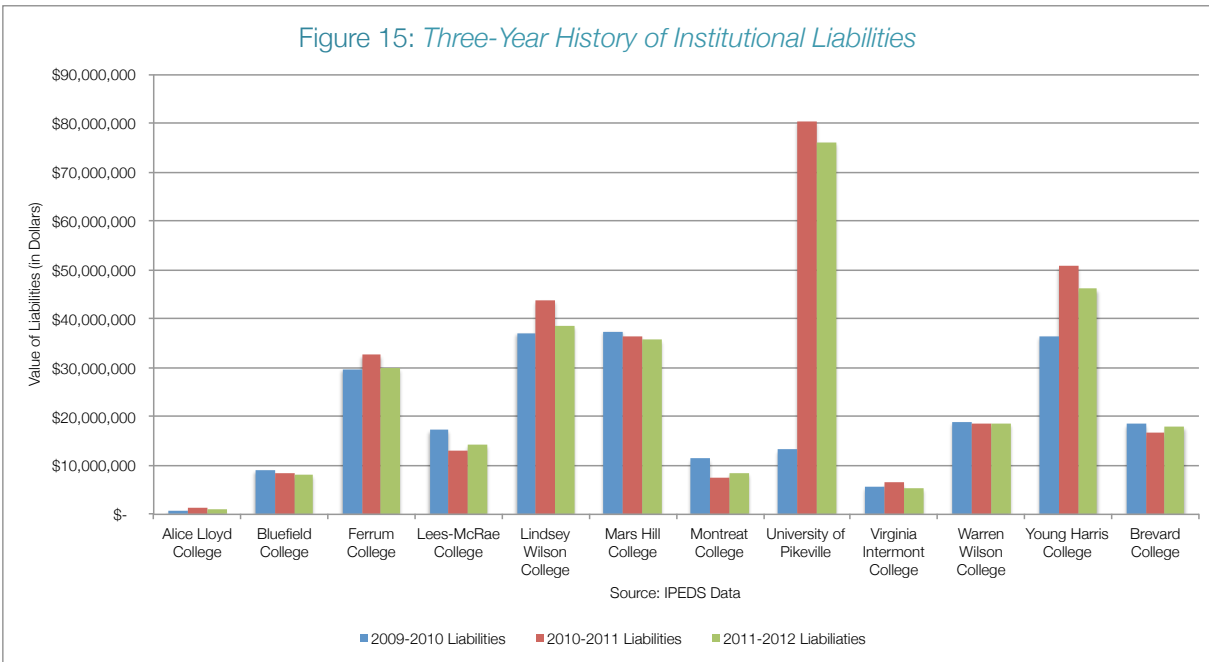
To give Brevard College a better sense of where it stands with regard to the other 11 institutions financially, we looked at three metrics: yearly assets, yearly liabilities, and the Federal Test of Financial Responsibility (FTFR) score. Assets and liabilities speak to the size and scope of financial operations at an institution while the FTFR Score conveys financial health of the college.

With regard to assets, Brevard College finds itself just below the median of the comparator group. In 2009-2010, it was at the 46th percentile of the group. And though the college saw just a million dollar decrease in its endowment, it fell to the 35th percentile of the comparator group in 2010-2011 and 33rd percentile in 2011-2012. Two of the larger institutions in the comparator group, Young Harris College and the University of Pikeville, saw marked gains in their asset portfolio, driving up the comparator group median. See Figure 14.



Liabilities have also proven to be relatively stable for Brevard College. In all three years for which data was collected, Brevard College’s liabilities approximated the comparator group median. With the exception of Young Harris and University of Pikeville, most institutions experienced similar stability. See Figure 15.





Strategic ratio analysis has become the industry standard for both measuring the financial health of a college internally and comparing similarly-situated institutions externally (Borden & Banta, 1994; KPMG & Sealy Prager, 2010). Ideally, we would have honored the industry standard and calculated the Composite Financial Index (CFI) for each of the 11 institutions included in the comparator group. The index, developed by Prager, Sealy & Co.; KPMG; and BearingPoint (KPMG & Sealy Prager, 2010), presents a wealth of data in terms of four key ratios that determine an organization’s financial health:

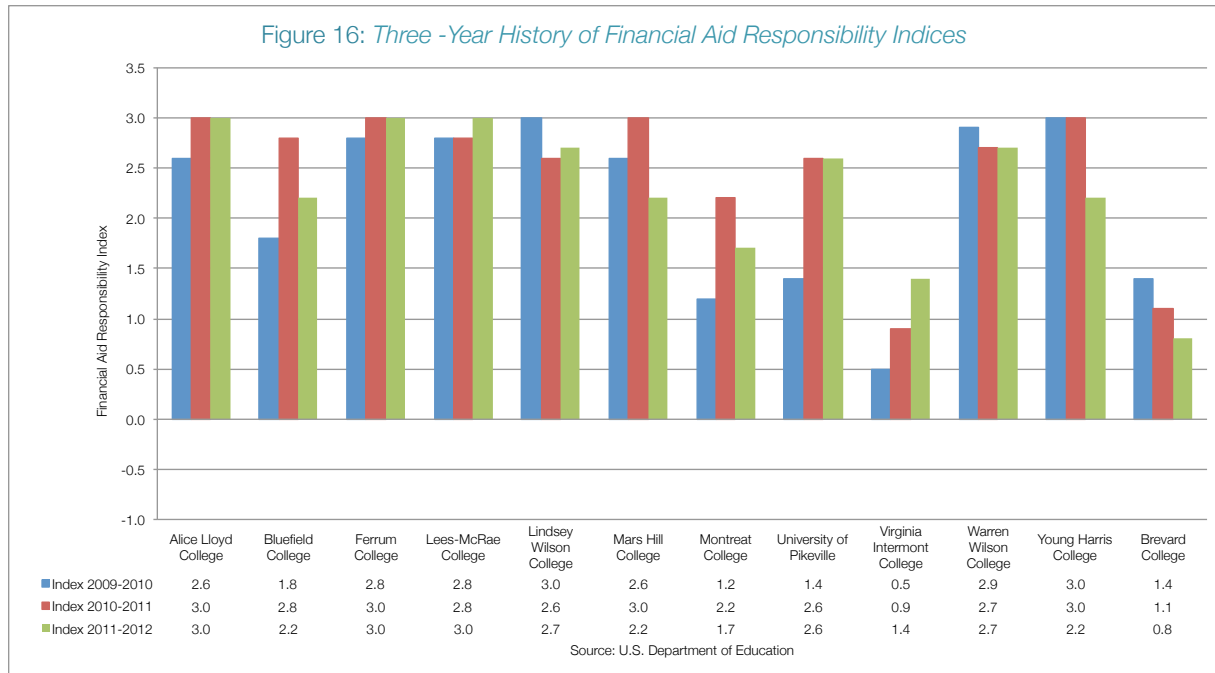
- Primary Reserve Ratio – A measure of the level of financial flexibility
- Net Operating Revenues Ratio – A measure of the operating performance
- Return on Net Assets Ratio – A measure of overall asset return and performance
- Viability Ratio – A measure of the ability to cover debt with available resources” (FIT Tools, Council of Independent Colleges).

Manual calculations of the CFI for institutions can be challenging: consistency of reported data, judgment calls on data to include or exclude in the ratio, or sourcing the data all prove difficult. As such, we opted for The Federal Test for Financial Responsibility as a proxy.

The FTFR, comprised of three ratios, is a scaled score between -1.0 and +3.0 (U.S. Department of Education). Institutions that score a +1.5 or better are considered to be financially healthy institutions by the U.S. Department of Education and require no additional oversight to administer financial aid programs. Scores between a 0.5 and 1.5 necessitate additional oversight, given the government’s concern about the institution’s financial viability. Scores lower than a 0.5 indicate an institution in the midst of a serious financial crisis (U.S. Department of Education).

Brevard College, in the most recent three years, has earned FTFR scores of 1.4 (2009-2010), 1.1 (2010-2011), and 0.8 (2011-2012) (U.S. Department of Education). Only Virginia Intermont College has indices that approach Brevard College’s. Working with Brevard College during the past year, however,

suggests that the change in institutional leadership has both acknowledge the financial challenges at present at the college and that President Joyce is taking steps to restore financial health to the institution. Figure 16 presents a summary representation of the data.

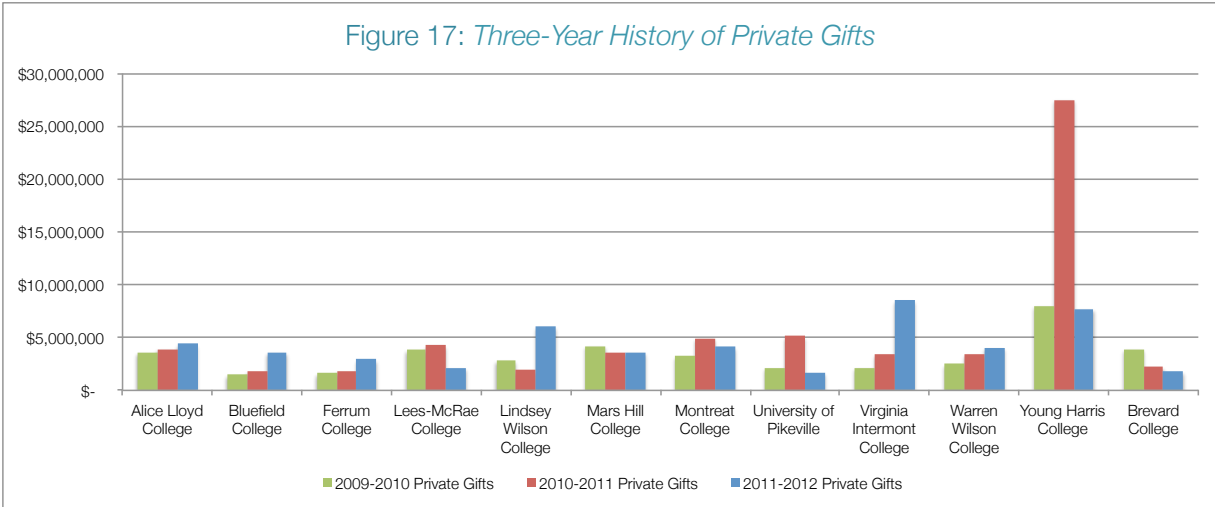


### Advancement-Specific Indicators

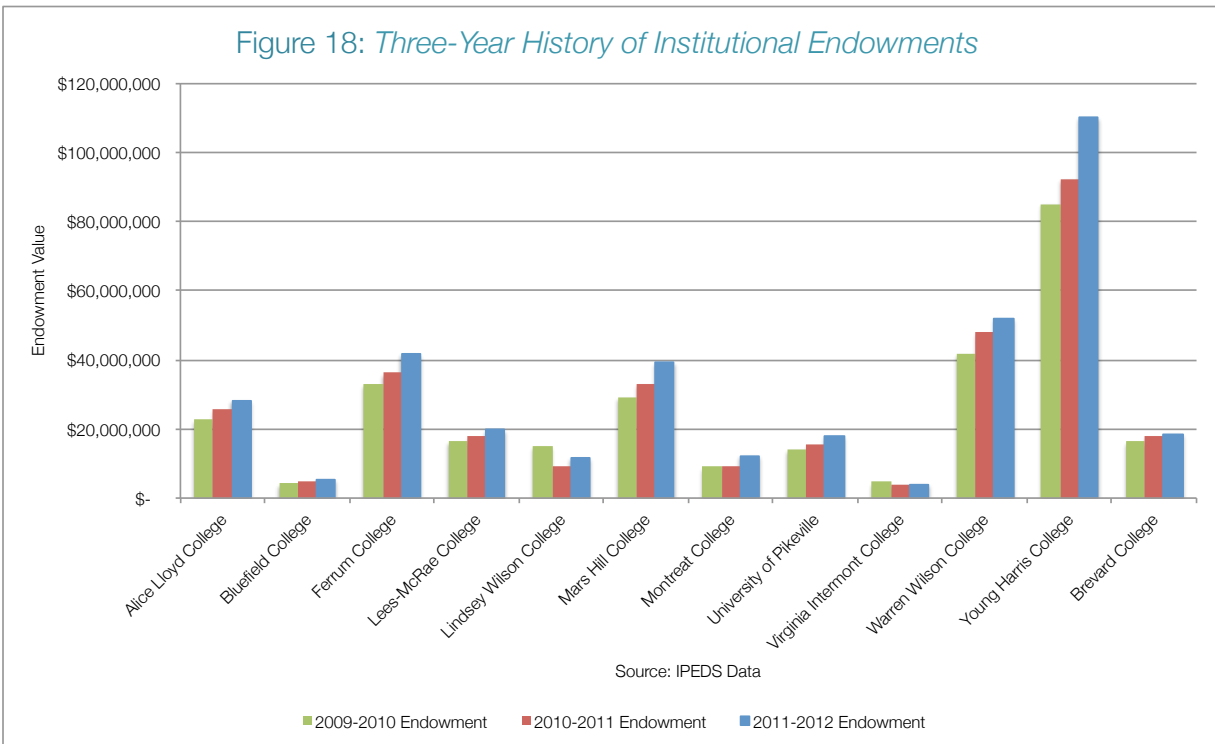
Lastly, we examined two publicly-available indicators of an institution’s advancement activity – the amount of private gifts received in a given year and the value of the institution’s endowment. Together, these indicators speak to the college’s fundraising performance.

By their nature, the amount of private gifts in a given year is likely to fluctuate; development relationships that results in transformational gifts, planned giving, and capital campaign conclusions all have the potential to artificially inflate numbers in a year. As such, we opted to look at the median value of a gift in each year for the 11 institutions.

In 2009-2010, the year directly following the U.S. economic crisis, Brevard College was at the 82nd percentile of the peer group of 11 institutions previously identified. In 2010-2011, and 2011-2012, Brevard College did not fare as well, falling below the 20th percentile in both years. However, it is worth noting that though Brevard College’s private gift total declined in both years subsequent to 2009, the decline was on the heels of several successful development years. Figure 17 represents this data.



Unlike the amount of private gifts, the institutional endowment is a more stable, long-term measure of institutional advancement success (See Figure 18). Though institutions have discretion over their endowment spending policies, most institutions have grown increasingly conservative in drawing down their endowments following the 2008 fiscal year (Sedlacek & Jarvis, 2010). The smallness of several institutions in the comparator group becomes more obvious when looking at endowment levels.



The positive? Nine of the 11 institutions included in the comparator group have seen at least modest endowment growth over the three years. Young Harris, the institution to most recently transition to a four-year baccalaureate program, has a significant advantage over its peers, with a 2012 endowment valued at \$110 Million. Compared to the remaining ten institutions in the peer group, Brevard College's endowment is

near the median of the peer group. Like many of its peers, its endowment has seen modest growth and recovery post-2008. Incidentally, the institution with the smallest endowment, Virginia Intermont College, has recently taken steps to safeguard its financial well-being for the future by merging with two colleges, one in Florida and one in North Carolina (Gentry personal correspondence, 2014).

### *Source Data and Research Foundations for Indicators*

| <b>Category</b>                 | <b>Indicator</b>                         | <b>Source</b>  | <b>Rationale</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Enrollment Metrics              | Student Enrollment                       | IPEDS Data (2010, 2011, 2012)                                | This is a key indicator of the size of an institution. Enrollment and size are important given that these are potential alumni (Martin & Sauvageot, 2011).  |
|                                 | Percentage of Applicants Admitted        |  | This gives interested colleges a gauge of the selectivity of the colleges included in the study; some literature suggests there to be a small relationship between selectivity and likelihood to contribute (Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Monks, 2003).  |
|                                 | Student Retention Rate                   |  | Though far from a true measure of effectiveness, student retention can help institutions consider a student's chance of success – a key driver of alumni giving (Leslie & Ramey, 1988).   |
| Financial Health and Complexity | Institutional Assets                     | IPEDS Data (2010, 2011, 2012)                                | Both assets and liabilities give a sense of the financial complexity of the institution, an important consideration for institutions generalizing from the best practices presented (Howard, McLaughlin, & Knight, 2012).   |
|                                 | Institutional Liabilities                |  |   |
|                                 | Federal Test of Financial Responsibility | Office of Student Financial Aid / US Department of Education | This is a measure of financial health of an institution. Acting as a proxy for the Composite Financial Index (KPMG & Sealy Prager, 2010), this measure combines three financial ratios into a single score between -1.0 and 3.0. Scores of 1.5 and greater suggest good financial health (U.S. Department of Education). Examining these scores can help institutions determine the both the necessity of development activity and the urgency at which it should be conducted (Gottfried, 2008; U.S. Department of Education). |
| Advancement-Specific Metrics    | Amount of Private Gifts                  | IPEDS Data (2010, 2011, 2012)                                | Both of these measures speak to the performance of the institutional advancement function at an institution. These indicators will serve as reference points for institutions when determining the feasibility of implementing the best practices borne from the study (Gottfried, 2008).   |
|                                 | Value of Institutional Endowment         |  |   |

## Peer Group Interview Analysis

Based upon our solicitation for participation, we have spoken with seven institutions from our peer group of 11. Each of the seven institutions has given consent for their names to be included within this report.

- Ferrum College
- Lees-McRae College
- Mars Hill College
- Montreat College
- University of Pikeville
- Virginia Intermont College
- Young Harris College

From our conversations with professionals at these institutions, we developed the data analysis strategy with the understanding that the constraints of the capstone project, chiefly an absence of resources (e.g. time, funding for transcriptions), prevents us from analyzing the data in adherence to agreed upon best practices in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Adopting a modified data analysis approach (Patton, 2002; Smrekar, 2012) ensures that the most substantive components of the conversations with college administrators are captured and organized into pertinent themes. The constant comparative method (Patton, 2002) was critical to discerning these themes throughout the analysis. Ultimately, this epistemological process leads to synthesizing the interviews, producing a well-conceived set of findings and best practices for Brevard College to consider and implement, if desired.

From this constant comparative method, the following thematic areas emerged:

- Best Practices in Organizational Structures and Mindsets
- Best Practices in Communications
- Best Practices in Alumni Engagement
- Best Practices in Community Relations

The next section highlights those themes and the subsequent subthemes that emerged from the analysis. Where appropriate and illustrative, institutions are highlighted for their exceptional practice or their practice's probable applicability to other institutions.

### How does Brevard College Compare?

#### Enrollment Indicators

Institutional Size: Consistently among the smallest institutions of the comparator group

- Fall 2010: 14<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 13<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 12<sup>th</sup> percentile

Admissions Selectivity: More selective than a majority of the comparator group; reflects institution's commitment to academics

- Fall 2010: 38<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 34<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 39<sup>th</sup> percentile

First-to-Second Year Retention Rates: Given low enrollment, a volatile measure; Brevard has challenges with retention

- Fall 2010: 30<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 90<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 35<sup>th</sup> percentile

#### Financial Indicators

Institutional Assets: Relatively strong, trending downward compared to the group

- Fall 2010: 46<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 35<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 34<sup>th</sup> percentile

Institutional Liabilities: Relatively strong and stable compared to the group

- Fall 2010: 57<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 47<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 49<sup>th</sup> percentile

Federal Test for Financial Responsibility: Among the bottom of the comparator group

- Fall 2010: 20<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 1<sup>st</sup> percentile

#### Advancement-Specific Indicators

Amount of Private Gifts: Highly volatile and contingent upon one-time transformational gifts

- Fall 2010: 82<sup>nd</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 22<sup>nd</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile

Institutional Endowment: A much more stable measure of long term advancement activity

- Fall 2010: 49<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2011: 50<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Fall 2012: 44<sup>th</sup> percentile

## Findings

### Best Practices in Organizational Structures and Mindsets

Three subthemes emerged from our findings around organizational structures and mindsets, each of which speaks to how to position institutional advancement and alumni engagement within the broader context of the organization.

- Subtheme 1: The Institutional Advancement Paradigm is Critical
- Subtheme 2: Engender a Sense of Philanthropy in Current Students and Young Alumni
- Subtheme 3: Incorporate Other Organizations and Functions at the Institution -- Narrative Collection Translates to Stewardship Opportunities

**Subtheme 1: Institutional Advancement Paradigm is Critical.** Small colleges are faced with unique challenges; chief among them is manpower management. People at small institutions, particularly in the institutional advancement offices we approached, both fulfill multiple roles and are asked to do a considerable amount for the university with limited resources. The mean size of the office staff of the institutions we interviewed was eight professionals. Given both the size of the endowments at these institutions and the expectations for development activity, efficiency in work is critical.

Ferrum College's Kim Blair serves as the college's Vice President for Institutional Advancement. In her role, she emphasizes the necessity for all of her staff members to embrace the institutional advancement triumvirate of development, alumni affairs and engagement, and public relations. "I communicate to my office that it is Team I.A. [Institutional Advancement] and that if we don't work together, we're spending a lot more energy than we need to. Let's work smarter, not harder, so that we can pool our resources. Having good alumni relations is only going to benefit our development team. And having a good development team is only going to benefit our alumni relations team." Blair's practice of mutually-reinforcing components within the Institutional Advancement Office has proven successful; alumni giving rates at the college have doubled within the past four years.

"I communicate to my office that it is Team I.A. [Institutional Advancement] and that if we don't work together, we're spending a lot more energy than we need to. Let's work smarter, not harder, so that we can pool our resources. Having good alumni relations is only going to benefit our development team. And having a good development team is only going to benefit our alumni relations team."

**Subtheme 2: Engender a Sense of Philanthropy in Current Students and Young Alumni.** From our conversations with various development and alumni affairs professionals, engendering a sense of philanthropy is important from an early age. The research, too, suggests this, recognizing that pivotal experiences in one's undergraduate years can trigger donations later in life (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Gaier, 2005; McDearmon, 2010).

Young Harris College has embraced this notion of developing a giving culture in its seniors. As a part of the Students Paying it Forward (S.P.I.F.) Program, all rising seniors receive a piggy bank along with instructions to

fill the bank with their spare change throughout the course of the year. Cathy Cox, President of Young Harris College, stresses that she has witnessed a real maturation in young alumni's attitudes toward giving as a result of the program. "We've had great strides with creating patterns of giving by encouraging students to give, regardless of the size. They get into the understanding that somebody helped to pay for their scholarships. This is the first step for them, as they start to realize that they, too, can give back." This point, that the size of the gift is unimportant, warrants mentioning explicitly, particularly when thinking about developing young alumni who contribute to the institution. While institutions offer platitudes about the size of the gift, Young Harris, through its S.P.I.F. program, instills that attitude into the minds of its seniors through action.

### **Subtheme 3: Incorporate Other Organizations and Functions at the Institution -- Narrative**

**Collection Translates to Stewardship Opportunities.** Several of the institutions we spoke to actively involve other functions at the organization. Whether it is with admissions, academic affairs, athletics, or fine and performing arts, development and alumni affairs are proactively seeking out ways to bring a more inclusive element to their advancement work. Succinctly, framing the campus to alumni and friends as a rich, multi-dimensional entity that lives as opposed to a singularly-aimed organization that needs financial contributions for survival.

Jordan Gibson, Alumni and Special Events Coordinator at the University of Pikeville, mentions the power of working cross-divisionally at the University. One of the key benefits he cites is the ability to gain a collection of narratives from which he and his colleagues can draw to share with alumni and friends. "We are constantly working on creating a more compelling narrative to give to the University," says Gibson. "Working with individuals in different parts of the school gives us a chance to learn about students who are living the mission." Gibson says that these students, the ones who embody the university mission, are both worthy of recognition and critical to developing a narrative for giving.

### **Best Practices in Communications**

Two subthemes emerged from our findings around communications with alumni and friend constituencies. Both of the themes suggest that communications need to be thoughtfully considered and guided by institutional aims broader than giving.

- Subtheme 1: Utilize a Strategic Approach to Reach Alumni and Friends: Questions Guide Practice.
- Subtheme 2: Generate Alumni Interest in Communicating with the College Beyond Giving

### **Subtheme 1: Utilize a Strategic Approach to Reach Alumni and Friends: Questions Guide Practice.**

Most of the conversations that we had with professionals from development and alumni relations offices stressed that communication was often discussed. Of the institutions that we spoke to, yearly communication plans were commonly used tools to schedule and organize information. However, a number of institutions shared concern and anxiety over different elements of the communication strategy. The professionals raised more questions than illuminating conclusive insight or best practices. Among the most-cited questions:

- How frequently do we need to communicate with our alumni and friends?
- Does the frequency with which we communicate vary with cohorts and generations of audiences?

- How do we coordinate our communications with other branches of the institution?
- In a small college setting, can a unified strategy be more effective at eliminating “communication fatigue” in our target audiences?
- What purposes do alumni and friends’ communications serve? To inform? To invite? To build relationships?
- How do we ensure consistency in messaging with other functions at the college?
- How do we effectively communicate changes in the institution (i.e. leadership changes, a refocused or shift in mission, or a transition from two-to-four year degrees) to alumni and friends who know the college as it was, rather than how it is and will be in the future?

The best practice that emerges from the conversations is that questions must guide the communication strategy. Haphazard or conflicting communications create noise for audiences, a deterrent from future involvement with the college (James, 2008; Leslie & Ramey, 1988; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001).

One commonality that we did see across different comparator institutions was the use of multi-modal communications tools. Certainly web-based and social-media-based presences are commonplace in alumni and friend engagement. However, each office was mindful of other, more traditional forms of communication to utilize, depending upon both the nature and content of the message along with the audience to whom the message was intended.

**Subtheme 2: Generate Alumni Interest in Communicating with the College Beyond Giving.** Several of the institutions we reached out to spoke of the need to give alumni a reason to interact with the college beyond financial pledges and commitments. This service-minded orientation creates connectivity.

One of the most-cited ways to generate this interest was through offering a robust career services and networking program for institutional alumni. Lees McRae’s Jillian Rosato said that opening up campus career service to alumni has generated more interest in the institution as a whole. Similarly, Ferrum College’s Kim Blair stressed the importance of alumni networks serving a second purpose as career networks. According to Blair, Ferrum College’s alumni board has a standing committee on career development.

### Best Practices in Alumni Engagement

Two subthemes emerged from our findings around maximizing alumni engagement. Both of the themes suggest that institutional champions need to be encouraged to participate in the institution in broad and diverse ways. More, an analytical approach to tracking geographic patterns of movement among graduates and friends may help use institutional resources effectively.

- Subtheme 1: Involve the Institutional Champions In Ways Beyond the Alumni Board
- Subtheme 2: Connecting Geographically with Events: Know and Analyze Where Graduates Settle

**Subtheme 1: Involve the Institutional Champions In Ways Beyond the Alumni Board.** Two institutions highlighted effective ways of enlisting alumni champions to generate good will and affinity for the institution. Lees McRae College utilizes a class agent program that has resulted in more accurate alumni records, increased alumni participation in institutional events, and stronger alumni relations. Jillian Rosato, Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving for the institution, says the program enlists at least one engaged alumni from each class to act as a “hub” for the class.



Brevard College, for its most recent series of reunions, also engaged highly involved alumni to help drive attendance for the events. Gil Coan, Jr., Brevard College Class of 1963, had demonstrated his commitment to the institution both financially and with his time. By way of interacting with the college's advancement office, Coan, Jr. saw a need to rally his classmates, encouraging them to attend homecoming. Through his personal network, he was able to reach a wide array of classmates, add new data to the institution's alumni records, and update the college's alumni rolls. According to Brevard College's Vice President of Advancement Susan Cothorn, the reunion both exceeded all expectations of the advancement office and eclipsed previous records for attendance and gifts pledged.

### **Subtheme 2: Connecting Geographically with Events: Know and Analyze Where Graduates Settle.**

Thirty eight percent of college students attend schools within 50 miles of their home (Sander, 2013). Couple this with the fact that all of the institutions in Brevard College's comparator groups are situated within a rural environment and the implications for creating high-touch, face-to-face experiences for alumni and friends become evident.

Jordan Gibson, Alumni and Special Events Coordinator at the University of Pikeville, discussed the importance of their new "AlumEvents" programming that happens on a local, regional, and national event. These events, designed to reconnect alums with the University, are often social in nature. Gibson says that the social nature allows alumni from the university to come together and get back into the habit of socializing with one another. As of June 2013, the university had hosted 30 to 35 events across the country with plans to host an additional 20 to 25 more by Summer 2014. Gibson says the University's key to success has emanated from this high-touch philosophy. Connectivity matters. .

Accurate and robust data collection techniques are vital for alumni relations and offices of institutional advancement. Increased amounts of data on alumni and friends of the institution can aid in developing appropriate data mining strategies. Data analytics are vital in an era of shrinking resources.

Like the University of Pikeville, both Virginia Intermont College and Ferrum College analyze their alumni footprints, thoughtfully hosting events where high concentrations of alumni reside. Virginia Intermont charges local alumni champions with hosting local and regional events where clusters of alumni have settled. Ferrum, recognizing that nearly 80 percent of its alumni settle in certain Virginia cities (e.g. Richmond, Blacksburg, Northern Virginia Metro), concentrates its efforts on those cities. Specifically, they have looked at developing vibrant alumni chapters in those areas to act as hubs for alumni engagement.

### **Best Practices in Community Relations**

Two subthemes emerged from our findings around engaging the broader community in which an institution is located. Both of the themes suggest that friend raising and the classic town-gown relationships need to be navigated with great care and intentionality. Assuming that the town values the college can be detrimental to the institution's long-term success.

- Subtheme 1: Community Engagement is Vital – Reciprocity Matters
- Subtheme 2: Consider How to Develop Friends of the College – Target Wisely and Assume Nothing

**Subtheme 1: Community Engagement is Vital: Reciprocity Matters.** Every institution, when asked about community relations, underscored the importance of their college to the surrounding town and county. Most of the institutions included in the study are among the largest employers in the surrounding area. Several colleges have conducted impact studies on the regions in which they are located, citing the significant value of the economic development that the schools generate as reason to better engage with the community.

Despite the economic generators that the institutions in the benchmark group have become for their respective towns and regions, the relationship between college and town must be framed as mutually beneficial. Many of the colleges, including Brevard, speak candidly about the immeasurable value that the institutions bring to the area, particularly in terms of cultural exposure and growth. Visual and performing arts opportunities, lecture series, and course offerings made widely available to the broader town or county have meaningful influence on community engagement.

Often times, these events are launching pads for friend-raising opportunities. In the case of Virginia Intermont College, friends have grown to become a more instrumental part of advancement than alumni and others with connection to the college.

**Subtheme 2: Consider How to Develop Friends of the College – Target Wisely and Assume Nothing.** Though the most recent best practice advises institutions to work closely with the surrounding community, institutions are wise to exercise a considerable amount of prudence when choosing whom to target. Said differently, offices of institutional advancement are wise to not assume that community members have a de facto interest in the institution.

Cathy Cox, President of Young Harris College, discussed the process by which she develops friends of the college. Town-gown relations are vitally important to small college, Cox asserts, advising that consistently monitoring the pulse of local community members is critical. She goes on to say that making assumptions about all members of the community as a singular unit is worth avoiding. She says that different people in the community respond to the institution differently, based upon their interactions with Young Harris. “The retirees who move to the area are the people who appreciate the college’s offerings to the community the most.” Cox develops those relationships slowly and with care – invitations to fine arts or sporting events, for example, are foundations upon which friendships can be built.

## Questions Outstanding

From our analysis of the practices currently taking place at the seven comparison institutions, we have three questions that remain unconsidered. Said differently, are there implications of the analysis that have emerged that warrant further consideration at Brevard or for the remainder of the institutions questioned?

### Question 1. A Matter of Being Early in the Transition?

Early in our research, we hypothesized that Brevard College was experiencing challenges with monitoring the success of its transition given its recency. Compared to the other institutions included within the comparator group, only Young Harris College transitioned from a two-year to four-year institution more recently (2008).

Given our hypothesis, we asked institutions about working with a potentially divided alumni base. When we asked institutions whether they distinguished between alumni with two-year degrees from four-year degrees, each institution responded that they did not. In fact, some institutions suggested that doing so would be deleterious to institutional advancement efforts. Ronda Gentry, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Virginia Intermont, worried that separating the two groups would undermine the efforts of the office. Other institutions, as a means of mitigating the effect of having a divided alumni body, harnessed the power of symbols (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Namely, key anniversaries in the lifespan of the college were moments upon which institutional advancement offices capitalized, coalescing alumni and friends around common visions for the future, regardless of graduation year.

Is it still early in the transition for Brevard College? Yes. However, our results fail to offer conclusive evidence that the recency of the transition has impacted other institutions similarly. Of note: Young Harris College, in the four years since its transition, has doubled the alumni giving rate and increased enrollment by almost 100%. However, the institution's financial footprint is more substantial than that of Brevard's.

### Question 2: An Air of Propriety Given the Competitive Landscape

Though not a direct methodological limitation, a unique air of propriety emerged during the interviews. Of the institutions participating in the benchmarking study, all expressed an interest in learning what other institutions were doing, particularly given the heightened competitive climate for development dollars. This is not surprising; we suggest that this climate, marked by more demands on people with fewer resources they are willing to give to institutions, has created a culture of best practice considerations – what is working and can we replicate it at our institution? Too, the anomic conditions present in the institutional advancement landscape can give rise to mimetic institutional isomorphism (Hermanowicz, 2011; Kezar & Eckel, 2011).

We suggest that this climate, marked by more demands on people with fewer resources they are willing to give to institutions, has created a culture of best practice considerations – what is working and can we replicate it at our institution?

The surprise, however, surfaces, when considering how institutions share knowledge of their own best practices. A spirit of competitiveness seemed to be a subtext that most of the participating institutions shared during their interviews. Without question, many of the benchmark institutions are in comparable financial situations to Brevard. However, each institution has a distinct set of alumni from which development

officers and school leadership draws for financial contribution. In other words, it stands to reason that Brevard College would seek to steward a certain set of alumni who had spent time at the college; individuals from comparable schools in different states would be beyond the institution's reach.

### **Question 3. Innovative Measures of Success in Alumni Giving and Engagement**

One of Brevard College's charges to our research group was to determine what other colleges are using in terms of metrics and indicators to measure success with alumni giving and engagement, specifically in light of the divided alumni body. In reaching out to the institutions included within the comparator group, we had anticipated finding both novel ways of measuring the success of institutional advancement offices and indicators that colleges used to track the "dividedness" of their alumni as a result of the transition.

However, each institution reinforced what the previous had said – quantifiable metrics determine success. The percentage of alumni giving, the percentage of alumni attending events (e.g. homecoming or alumni weekend), and the amount of gifts pledged and received by alumni groups are indicators of a healthy alumni giving and engagement program.

Few, if any, institutions mentioned the presence of high-functioning alumni boards, vibrant alumni chapters, or successful relationships with friends of the college as markers of successful institutional advancement practices. Perhaps, the fundamental charge of institutional advancement officers – advance the college financially – predisposes people to consider only the quantitative measures of success. We contend that the qualitative indicators enumerated above do speak to the quality of the institutional advancement office. In fact, those indicators can be instructive to offices as they plan for future initiatives to increase alumni giving and engagement.

# Limitations

Though we made every attempt to ensure that each prong of our analysis was conducted with identified best practices and methodologies in mind, a number of limitations still surface. We mention them here both as acknowledgment of the challenge of conducting practice-oriented research and to suggest that these limitations ultimately temper the sets of recommendations we put forth in subsequent sections of this work.

## Limitations for Project Question I

### Survey Distribution

We had limited contact information in the Brevard alumni database. “Only 68 percent of alumni contacts are accounted for,” (S. Cothorn, personal communication, July 8, 2013). That combined with email contacts for only one third of the alumni in the database resulted in our survey reaching around a quarter of the total Brevard College alumni. It is important to consider how alumni who are accessible by email differ from those who are not. Electronic survey distribution often results in lower response rates than paper surveys (Nulty, 2008), but cost to mail surveys and geographic spread of the alumni prohibited use of another method. Furthermore, we used a convenience sample, so we must take into account differences in people who opted to reply to our survey versus those who did not. The non-random, limited sample and non-response bias are a threat to the generalizability of our results.

### Survey Design

The format of some of our questions did not lend themselves to the types of analysis we wished to perform. For example, age was reported categorically, but having respondent’s report their exact age would have been the preferred format (ratio data). Giving history was reported categorically as “four out of the last four years,” “three out of the last four years,” “one or two out of the last four years,” or “none of the last four years.” Having respondents report their total lifetime giving to Brevard would have allowed for alternative types of analysis and more defined predictors of giving. For analysis purposes, we recoded giving as a binary variable (history of giving/no history of giving), but this is not an accurate assessment of a person’s philanthropic experience with Brevard. It is a crude measure; we do not have any data outside the four-year period in which we asked respondent’s to report (maybe they made a gift ten years ago, but are coded as no history of giving in our results).

Finally, we did not have respondents report income, which is proven to have a strong correlation with giving history. Our regression model might have been stronger if we had controlled for income. That being said, there is agreement in the literature that age can be used successfully as a proxy for income (Radcliffe, 2011).

## Limitations for Project Question II

### Selection Bias

First, we used a convenience sample in our methodology instead of a random sample. We initially planned to compile a list of all Brevard friends and randomly select from the list. We opted against this method primarily because members of the Brevard advancement office preferred to make initial contact with donors (which served as another opportunity for them to steward their donors. As a result, selection bias affects the validity of our results. Friends may have been selected who have an overwhelming affinity for the institution because of their good standing with Brevard. We also used a convenience sample based on friends’ availability. Some friends could not participate simply because they were not available when our project team scheduled interviews.

## Response Bias

A second limitation to our methodology was the process data was collected. Some interviews were conducted over the phone due to travel restrictions. Seven of the twenty-one interviews were conducted over the phone and two married couples (four Brevard friends) were interviewed at the same time. As a result, some of their responses may be biased to reflect the response of their spouse.

## Limitations for Project Question III

### Small Sample Size

The first limitation stems from the small number of institutions willing to participate in the benchmarking study. Though there are no prescribed best practices in terms of numbers of institutions to include in a study such as the one conducted here, increasing the number of participants would only serve to make the best practices derived from the conversation more robust. Granted, we worked to draw an appropriate institutional field for Brevard College, given the specificity of their request; however, we are left with the question of whether a more inclusive field analysis would result in a broader spectrum of participants.

### External Validity

Questions of external validity are raised throughout this practitioner-based qualitative research. Though we have attempted to build an appropriate amount of context for each institution included within the study, generalizability questions remain. Particularly, Shadish's work on considerations for generalizability (1995) has high applicability here, given that the results are designed to be extraordinarily generalizable. Again, the intrinsic purpose of the work was to gather and deduce best practices for replication in similarly situated institutions. What we would suggest for institutions that utilize this work is to view the best practices as items for consideration and exploration in one's own institution rather than a blueprint for guaranteed success.

### Use of the Financial Responsibility Composite Score in Lieu of the Composite Financial Index

For two reasons, using the Composite Financial Index would be more appropriate in the analysis. First, the CFI tends to be more widely used and widely recognized in the industry. Second, Brevard College, in its forthcoming strategic plan, has chosen to emphasize the CFI as one of its key financial metrics to track year-over-year. However, given the constraints of calculating an accurate CFI for an institution, we opted to use the publicly-available Financial Responsibility Composite Scores calculated by the U.S. Department of Education as a proxy for institutional financial health (Hignite, 2009). More limited than the CFI, the Composite Score does help give an overall estimate of the fiscal health of institution. A key challenge, however, is in the statistic's volatility – the calculation of the measure is susceptible to one-time financial events such as a spike in enrollment (Hignite, 2009; KPMG & Sealy Prager, 2010). We have provided three years of scores to mitigate the statistic's instability.

# Summary

Our mixed method approach allowed us to circumspectly view Brevard College through a tripartite lens. The quantitative survey enlarged our perspective on alumni behaviors of a small, liberal arts college while the qualitative studies illustrated how Brevard compares to the local community and, outwardly, to similar institutions. The following section summarizes the approach and findings of each project question.



## Revisiting Project Question I

### What personal characteristics contribute to low levels of alumni giving?

We proposed five hypotheses to address this project question. The hypotheses explored the relationship between campus involvement and giving history, fondness for Brevard and giving history, positive undergraduate experience (satisfaction) and giving history, and alumni engagement and giving history. We also investigated differences between two-year alumni and four-year alumni on these items. Results suggested that campus involvement increases the likelihood of giving by 13.9 percent; fondness for Brevard did not have a significant effect on giving behaviors; and satisfaction increases the likelihood of giving by 14.2 percent. With respect to the differences between two-year and four-year alumni, significant differences were found on the campus involvement and fondness scales. Bachelor's degree holders were more likely to be donors than associate degree holders.

To measure alumni engagement, we studied mission embodiment, connection, and feelings of responsibility. Alumni who agree that Brevard embodies its mission are 9.9 percent less likely to give to Brevard, while for each one point higher an alumnus rated their level of connection to Brevard, their likelihood of donating increased by 15.9 percent. For each one point increase in feelings of responsibility, giving increases by 30.8 percent. As discussed earlier, these results have strong practical implications for Brevard College advancement services in how they solicit alumni and for Brevard College.

## Revisiting Project Question II

### What is the perception of Brevard College among alumni and friends of the institution?

To discover the perception of Brevard from the community, we conducted a standard interview process with Brevard friends. Friends primarily consisted of retirees who settled in the town and a smaller percentage was alumni or faculty emeriti. We interviewed a total of 18 friends. After listening to the recorded dialogue, our project team analyzed the interviews using a concept-clustered matrix and extrapolated the following seven emergent themes – Mountains and Valleys: Strengths and Weaknesses of Brevard; Face of a Tornado: Student Characteristics; Making a Shift: Effects of the Transition; Positive New Leadership: Opinions about Administration; We Go Hand-in-Hand: Interactions with the Community; Why I Give: Donor Motivations; and finally Experiential Education: Perception of Brevard Mission.

We discovered several interesting characteristics about Brevard based on friends' similarities in response. Friends perceive Brevard College to be a major asset to the Transylvania County, hold high regard for the current president and faculty, and believe Brevard should embrace its intimate class setting in spite of pressures from society to increase enrollment. Friends recognize the facilities to be a significant drawback to the institution and suggest Brevard should clarify its mission to the philanthropic public. Based on these responses, we predict most of Brevard friends – major local donors – are motivated to give for the betterment of the town and the people involved within the community. Like most colleges, Brevard will not gain immediate philanthropic wealth from its recent graduates, but strengthening the connection between students and the local community may possibly increase philanthropic behavior from the residents in the town and, eventually, from the alumni population.

## Revisiting Project Question III

### **How does Brevard College compare to benchmarks of similar liberal arts institutions that have successfully transitioned from a 2-year to 4-year college?**

The two to four year transition in 1995 has had far-reaching implications for the institution. Brevard College asked us to incorporate a benchmarking study into our work in order to better understand those implications in the present day context. Premised on the notion that the College is still relatively new to the four-year degree landscape, Brevard requested that we look externally to comparable institutions. Comparability, we determined, would be ensured by looking at enrollment, financial, and advancement-specific indicators at the institutions we invited to participate in the benchmarking study.

We identified 11 institutions that met each of the three criteria that we deemed appropriate – membership within the Appalachian College Consortium, a shared experience with an institutional transition from two to four years, and comparability in terms of a small liberal arts college designation. Seven of the 11 institutions we approached elected to participate in the benchmarking study. The study was designed to discern distinctive best practices and experiences that could be both borrowed and translated into the Brevard College context. Ultimately, four sets of best practices were identified:

- Best Practices in Organizational Structures and Mindsets
- Best Practices in Communications
- Best Practices in Alumni Engagement
- Best Practices in Community Relations

From these best practices, we are able to share nine specific approaches that institutional advancement executives are using across the seven institutions. In the end, we hope that the benchmarking study enables the Brevard College leadership team to understand that, given the recency of the transition, the institution is in a promising position. The emergent best practices will serve as guides for Brevard College as it moves further away from its 1995 watershed moment.

# Recommendations & Further Study Possibilities

## Recommendations To Address Mission vs. Market Challenges

We propose the following recommendations based on the data from our three project questions. Recommendations are organized around major themes we found across our quantitative and qualitative research.

### Evaluate How Solicitations are Made to Donors

- **Craft solicitations around student engagement, or around “giving back to campus life.”** Since involvement plays such a strong role in future giving potential, allow alumni the opportunity to give back to residence life, lacrosse, debate, etc. Alumni can support the organizations that most resonate with their Brevard experience.
- **Harness the sense of responsibility that many alumni feel towards maintaining the quality of a Brevard college education.** This could be a subtle approach woven into personal communication or a more transparent “pay it forward” solicitation.

### Explore the Institutional Advancement Infrastructure

- **Increased staffing for alumni office.** Compared to the peer institutions, Brevard College is attempting to engage its donors with a relatively small staff. The research suggests that an increased staff often results in increased financial success (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Proper, Caboni, Hartley, & Willmer, 2009).
- **Develop an infrastructure to begin tracking student involvement on campus in their alumni database.** For example, if the alumni was a Resident Advisor, or played on a sports team, that information should be tracked in their database. This would allow for targeted solicitations and personalized communications to special interest groups. By personalizing solicitations, the Brevard can draw on “fond” memories to encourage alumni to give back.
- **Track alumni locations and analyze geographic patterns of alumni settling.** Data mining the alumni database for high concentrations of alumni can assist Brevard College in planning local and regional alumni event. Are alumni remaining in Western North Carolina? Are they spreading regionally?

Nationally? Knowing where they are concentrated helps drive connectivity to the institution through events and regional alumni networks.

- **Prioritize investment on facilities.** “Organizations alter appearances to mirror changes in the social expectations” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 366). The external view of Brevard should emulate the internal changes that have taken place. Brevard College needs to look like a four-year institution by improving the dormitory and classroom facilities.

### Systematic Consideration of Advancement

- **Approach advancement systemically across the institution.** As put by Stutler & Calvario (1996), “the role of alumni fund raising cannot be viewed as the sole responsibility of the alumni and development offices. Alliances must be developed which involved the campus community” (p. 13).
- **Attention should be given to measuring ‘customer satisfaction’ with one’s college experience.**
- **Measure success of transition beyond advancement office.** Have programs matured? Have additionally faculty been hired? The essential concept that should guide Brevard in this measure is whether the college is trying to do more with the same or doing more with more?

### Bridge Gap Between Students & Alumni

- **Create alumni from day one.** Begin to think about fundraising efforts when a new class enters Brevard. This requires a larger systems approach to philanthropy across the college as a whole.
- **Class giving campaigns.** Whether this takes the form of interclass competition or a “senior class gift,” begin to ‘teach’ students about giving back.
- **Cultivate engagement opportunities.** Results of this study suggest that involvement is highly correlated with giving behavior, so encourage students to get involved on campus and find their niche.
- **Develop student leaders.** Provide opportunities to train students how to be effective leaders.
- **Create a giving society or senior gift program.** This is a student-led initiative that allows students to financially support Brevard that will provide future Brevard students with the same advantages they received. Gifts typically happen annually.
- **Capitalize on Brevard strengths to make the giving society creative and appealing to young alumni.** “Symbolic forms and activities are the basic building blocks of culture, accumulated over time to shape an organization’s unique identity and character” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 331). Friends describe Brevard’s strengths as the small, intimate class size, student-faculty ratio, wilderness location, and recreational opportunities. Use these characteristics to symbolize who Brevard is to young alumni.

### Organize Key Events to Connect Donors to Brevard

- **Hosting a Coalescing Event or Celebration for All Alums Beyond homecoming.** Bolman and Deal underscore the power of symbols in organizations (2013). Institutions included in the

benchmarking survey suggest that these events can capture the spirit of the institution, acting as a unifying or coalescing moment for alums, regardless of their graduation year and diploma level.

- **Give people a reason to interact beyond philanthropic reasons.** How else can alumni be brought into the institution? Perhaps the two most common practices are engaging alumni beyond standing committees and engaging alumni through career and networking services. Both of these practices generate interested and drive alumni to connect. Connectivity matters.
- **Organize bookend events to inform, applaud, and recruit local philanthropic donors.** Brevard friends (mostly Communitarians and Socialites) need to see that Brevard is being run productively and want public acknowledgement (Prince & File, 1994). Holding a philanthropic banquet, for example, at the beginning of the year allows Brevard to clarify its education goals and mission to friends, acknowledge and/or congratulate important donors, and increase donors and their involvement. The end-of-the-year event allows Brevard to recap all the things they accomplished during the school year with help from the local community.

## Opportunities for Further Study For Brevard College & Its Peers

### Further Exploration into Student Engagement and the Impact on Philanthropy

Given the strong correlation found in the literature and confirmed by our research, it would be worthwhile to further investigate the relationship between student engagement at Brevard and giving behaviors. Is student engagement at Brevard on par with that of other peer institutions? How might the level of engagement influence giving? Brevard could administer the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to measure engagement on their campus. Data could then be compared to the national NSSE database. This process would allow for Brevard to make an assessment of student engagement which could then inform a more systemic approach to fundraising ( i.e. engaged student = engaged alumni = greater likelihood of giving) (Caboni, 2003; Clotfelter 2003, Gaier, 2005; Hoyt, 2004). The NSSE might also be used to identify what types of students to target for donations once they achieve alumni status.

### Further Exploration into Donor Personalities with Local Community

Brevard friends strongly resemble the descriptions of the Seven Faces of Philanthropy (Prince & File, 1994). The study depicts all donors of non-profit organizations fall under the following seven personalities – The Communitarian: Doing Good Makes Good Sense, The Devout: Doing Good is God’s Will, The Investor: Doing Good is Good Business, The Socialite: Doing Good is Fun, The Altruist: Doing Good Feels Right, The Repayer: Doing Good in Return, and The Dynast: Doing Good is a Family Tradition. This study explains the characteristics of each personality, why donors give, how each donor personality selects non-profits, and what donors expect from non-profits after their contribution is received. It behooves Brevard College to know what types of donors reside in the local community. Further investigation will help determine how to get Brevard friends more involved, make efficient use of current donors, and recruit more donors from the local community.

### Further Exploration into the Small College Transition Saga

As institutions continue to respond to the dynamic higher education landscape, how can colleges capture the consequences—both positive and negative—and the implications associated with such shifts?

Borrowing from the corporate mindset, dynamic organizations require a healthy commitment to continuous organizational improvement. Brevard, by reaching out and enlisting Vanderbilt's assistance with increasing its understanding of the transition, is taking the steps necessary to embrace this mindset. How might academicians capture institutional transition moments, particularly when there are no agreed upon industry indicators? Can the creation of a before-after model of institutional transformation be created and introduced to institutions? For example, are there an agreed upon set of markers that can be measured over the five years before and the five years after a shift in institutional mission to determine to what extent the transition has shaped the institution? Inflection points in institutional histories matter; capturing them quantitatively and qualitatively only serves to elevate the college's performance in the future.

# Final Thoughts & A Conclusion

We find it fitting at this point to share our gratitude with a remarkable group of people. We want to thank Brevard College and the team of consummate professionals with which we have had the pleasure to work during the past nine months. From our initial visit in July 2013, we have been shown nothing less than absolute warmth and hospitality. Led by the inimitable Susan Cothorn, the Advancement Team at Brevard College is poised for a bright future. Throughout our engagement, Susan and her team have been the ideal clients -- responsive, open, collaborative, and invested in the project's success. The team's efforts to help guide this project to success are evidence of the commitment that they have to Brevard College's continued maturation.

Throughout this process, Professor John M. Braxton has been a constant source of guidance. With his wise words and expertise, we feel confident that our work for Brevard College is both better and more useful. We are fortunate to have been under his tutelage for the past three years; his wisdom and passion for education inspires us to work harder for both ourselves and for the constituents of Brevard College.

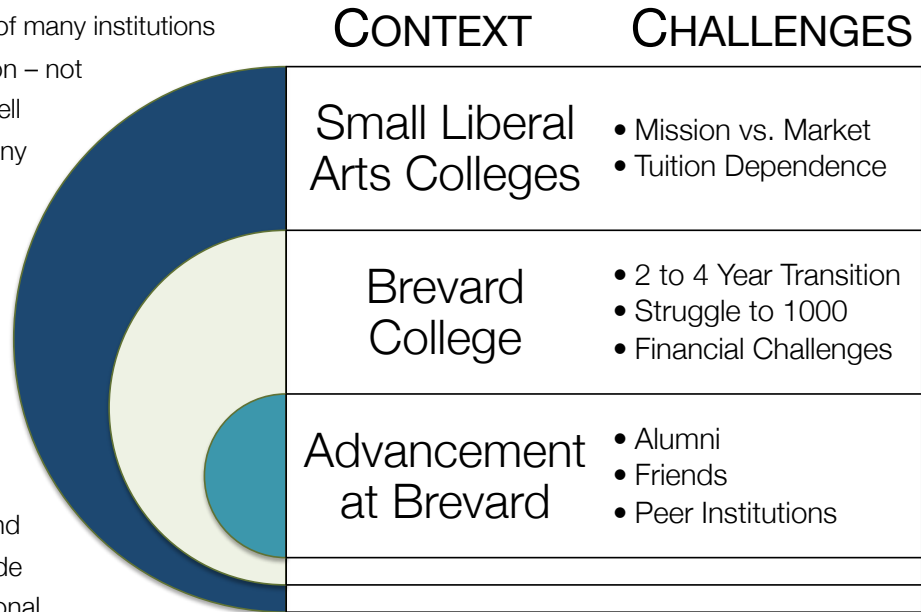
The purpose of our project was, at core, to assist Brevard College in developing a more robust understanding of a watershed moment in the institution's history. Deciding to grant four year degrees in 1995 represented a shift of the institutional narrative. Turning the page, if you will, alumni and friends that had come to know and love the college for its intimacy, academic prestige, and tightly-bonded community were uncertain that those facets would endure the transition to the four-year college. Surveying alumni, however, reveal that most of that uncertainty has been unfounded. Alumni and friends of the college continue to give of their time and resources to the campus in the mountains.

It is true, however, that transitions and institutional changes are challenging for any institution. In 1995, when members of the Brevard College community elected to offer four year degrees, the narrative of the institution that several generations of alumni had come to know shifted. This departure from the rich and robust two-year legacy that Brevard College developed since its founding in 1934 has inspired our work. We recognize the College for acknowledging the shift's implications on Brevard's operations today and for committing itself to further understanding those shifts. Simultaneously, we hope Brevard College and its leadership find that the recommendations we have crafted, are of use as they continue to share its story. It is the opinion of the project team that Brevard College is truly poised for a bright future and we are privileged to have been allowed a small chance to contribute to that success.

## A Conclusion: Higher Education Still Mired in Change

We return to where we began. Higher education is mired in change. And nowhere is this change more magnified than at a small liberal arts college. Institutional missions are often at odds with present market realities and the smallness of the institutions only serves to exacerbate the contemporary dilemmas. Enrollment volatility creates challenges for institutional financial stability – losing a dozen students can spell disaster for a yearly budgeting process. Questions abound about the relevance of the liberal arts education in today’s increasingly competitive job market. The critical question that undergirds these conversations is this: when an institution, in response to the market, changes tact and moves in a direction different from its historical mission, how do various constituents respond? More specifically, does the transition harm, help, or have no effect on the willingness of alumni and friends to financially support the institution?

Brevard College is but one of many institutions facing this challenge head on – not doing so would certainly spell disaster for the future of many small, tuition-dependent colleges across the country. In order to serve Brevard College, we built a conceptual framework that incorporates a host of constituents. We looked retrospectively in order to understand the transition and how alumni and friends made sense of the shift in institutional



direction. We, too, looked prospectively; given that we were charged with helping Brevard College better understand its future, looking to other institutions as a way of identifying best practices in managing an institutional transition. It is imperative to look externally as Brevard College continues to grapple with the mission versus market dualism that is present reality.

Succinctly, the undergraduate experience matters, both then and now. Alumni who reported higher levels of involvement and engagement with the institution while they were students are more likely to give. This confirms what the literature suggests – connectedness to the college can trigger philanthropic behaviors (Hoyt, 2004; Miller & Casebeer, 1990; Gaier, 2005; Marr et al., 2005; and Clotfelter, 2001). Time matters, too; those undergraduates who persisted to earn a four-year degree at Brevard College are more likely to give than their two-year counterparts. What does this say for Brevard and other similarly-situated liberal arts colleges in terms of institutional advancement? Though fundraising is inherently a time-delayed institutional activity, it need not be. How can institutions be attentive to the undergraduate experience, specifically as it relates to creating a culture of philanthropy among its student population? Approaching development and fundraising as an institution-wide collaborative venture is imperative (Weick, 1976). This trend was externally



validated by many of the peer institutions with which we interacted. Developing donors from a student's first moments on campus has proven critical to institutional success in fundraising.

Surprisingly, the institution's transition from two to four years failed to trigger strong feelings in most alumni or friends of the college. What has proven to matter? In the case of Brevard College, strong leadership has inspired confidence in the college's future (Bremner, 1988). That confidence translates to dollars raised. Contrastingly, alumni and friends yearn for a more clearly-articulated institutional mission. This underscores the importance of institutions embodying and living their stated missions – clarity and purpose. For the four faces of philanthropy identified at Brevard College, this consonance between mission articulated and mission lived matters (Prince & File, 1994).

In the end, it is our sincere hope that Brevard College, with the Appalachians as its backdrop, continues to live its mission of experiential education. Its distinctiveness resonates with current students, alumni, and friends of the college. Brevard's peers suggest that communicating a lived mission is integral to fundraising efforts. And this is a lesson that reaches far beyond the context of Brevard College – a mission lived and embodied is a mission that inspires faith and courage in institutions; those are the ingredients vital to successfully battle the mission versus market realities present today.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Alumni Survey

### Brevard Alumni Experience Survey

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey about your Brevard experience. Your input is critical to us in determining how we can better connect with our alumni.

This survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time, and your answers will be completely anonymous. Please read each item carefully. Select the answer choice that best reflects your attitude regarding the statement or question. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it, and move on to the next question.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact us [thomasak@brevard.edu](mailto:thomasak@brevard.edu) or call 615.500.4995.

### Section 1: Demographics

How many semesters did you attend Brevard College? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you earn an associate degree or a bachelor's degree from Brevard College?

- Associate
- Bachelors
- Transferred to another school to complete my degree
- Did not earn a degree at any institution

If you earned an associate degree, did you go on to complete a bachelor's degree at another institution?

- Yes
- No

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Were you the first in your immediate family to attend college?

- Yes, I am the first in my family to attend college.
- No, I have immediate family members that attended some college/have college degrees.

What race or ethnicity do you identify as?

- White-non Hispanic
- Black-non Hispanic
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian Pacific Islander

- American Indian or Alaska
- Bi-racial or multi-racial
- Other
- International student

What is your current age?

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66-70
- 71 or older

Please check any of the following that applied during your time at Brevard

- Student athlete
- Honor student
- Involved in at least 1 campus organization
- Leader in at least 1 campus organization
- Transfer student to Brevard College
- Transfer student away from Brevard College
- Switched majors during your time at Brevard
- Served as a resident advisor
- Received career counseling during your Brevard College experience
- Worked a part time job during your time at Brevard College
- Received a Brevard College merit-based scholarship
- Received need-based financial aid
- Brevard was your first choice for school



## Section 2: College Experience/Perception of Brevard

Please select the element(s) that shaped or contributed to your fondest experiences at Brevard College:  
(Select all that apply)

- A professor
- Classmates
- The nature and beauty of North Carolina
- A certain class
- Major field or department
- A club or organization
- Roommate
- Residence hall
- A staff member
- An intercollegiate sport/coach
- Community service activity/experience
- Off-campus field experience
- Sense of community
- Leadership experience
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Which statement best describes the role that Brevard played in your educational and career aspirations?

- Brevard played a significant role in my life; I would not be where I am today without Brevard College
- Brevard played an important role in my life; I think back fondly about my college experience.
- Brevard played a moderate role in my life; I got a college degree, but the fact that it was from Brevard makes little difference.
- Brevard played little role in my life; my time at Brevard is somewhat irrelevant to where I am today.
- Brevard played no role in my life; my time at Brevard is entirely irrelevant to where I am today.

We would like you to think about how you feel about Brevard on various characteristics. For each characteristic, please indicate how well you feel it describes Brevard (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree):

|   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Has an excellent faculty  |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| Has a supportive environment that helps students thrive               |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| Offers a unique college experience                                    |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| Does a good job of balancing tradition with the need for change       |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| Displays a strong sense of values and ethics                          |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| Values its relationship with alumni by keeping them closely connected |                |       |                            |          |                   |

How well do you feel that Brevard embodies its mission: “Brevard College is committed to an experiential liberal arts education that encourages personal growth and inspires artistic, intellectual, and social action.”

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

As a person who has spent time at Brevard College previously, to what extent do you feel connected to Brevard?

- Very Strongly
- Strongly
- Moderately
- Weakly
- Not at all

What factors influence the level of your connection?

|                                      | Very Important | Quite Important | Moderately Important | Slightly Important | Not Important |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Visiting Campus                      |                |                 |                      |                    |               |
| Connecting with Friends from Brevard |                |                 |                      |                    |               |
| News from Brevard                    |                |                 |                      |                    |               |

Others (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of information, from and about Brevard, would enhance your feelings of connection?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate whether or not you agree with the following statement: “I feel a personal responsibility to maintain the quality of a Brevard education.”

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

### Section 3: Giving To Brevard

What best describes your recent history of financial contributions to Brevard College. I have given to Brevard:

- Four out of the last four years
- Three out of the last four years
- One or two of the last four years
- Not at all in the last four years

If you have contributed to Brevard two times or less in the past four years, consider your reasons why and indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| I'd rather support organizations in my community                                       |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| I don't feel connected to Brevard College  |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| I believe the organizations I support need more financial support than Brevard College |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| I have concerns about the direction Brevard College is headed                          |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| I was not satisfied with my time at Brevard College                                    |                |       |                            |          |                   |

Others (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Below is a list of potential reasons for not donating to Brevard. For each reason, please indicate whether it is a major factor, a minor factor, or not a factor at all for you not donating to Brevard.

|  | Major Factor | Minor Factor | Not a Factor At All |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| I feel that I've paid enough already for tuition                                 |              |              |                     |
| I don't think the school really needs the money                                  |              |              |                     |
| I haven't been given a good enough reason to give                                |              |              |                     |
| They haven't done enough to connect with me besides asking for money             |              |              |                     |
| I feel like donations go into a "black hole"                                     |              |              |                     |
| I feel like a small gift won't make a difference                                 |              |              |                     |
| I want my donations to go for a specific purpose and don't have that option      |              |              |                     |
| I don't feel a deep emotion connection to the school                             |              |              |                     |
| I prefer to make donations to other organizations instead                        |              |              |                     |
| I would like to contribute to Brevard College but am financially unable to do so |              |              |                     |

Please indicate whether or not you agree with the following statement: "I only hear from Brevard when they're asking me for money"

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

When solicited for a gift from Brevard, is it important from whom the solicitation comes?

- Very important
- Quite Important
- Moderately Important
- Slightly important
- Not important

If the source of solicitation is important to you, from which of the following people would you most like to hear?

- President
- Chair or member of the Board of Trustees
- Faculty members
- Classmates/other alums
- Current students
- Staff

## Appendix B: Brevard “Friends” Interview Protocol

### Brevard Friends Interview Questions

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in the Brevard Friends Interview. Your input is critical to us in determining how Brevard College impacts the local community and encourages engagement.

This interview should take no more than 20-30 minutes of your time and your answers will be completely anonymous. Please answer each question from your point of view. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it, and move on to the next question.

### Engagement

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are you with Brevard College?
- How do you demonstrate your involvement?
- What forms of communication encourage your involvement (i.e. newsletters, events, phone calls, etc.)?

### Image Perception

- What do you perceive to be the mission statement of Brevard?
- How do you perceive Brevard College at being successful of carrying out that mission?
- What do you know about the...?
  - Administration
  - Board of Trustees
  - Faculty
  - Students
  - Alumni
  - Facilities
- How would you describe Brevard’s priority in connecting with local community: High, Moderate, or Low?
- What are the strengths of Brevard College?
- In what areas, if any, do you see potential for improvement?

### Giving

- How did you initially become involved with Brevard College
- What inspires you to give toward Brevard College?
- What aspects demonstrate that Brevard College is an efficient steward of gifts and contributions?
- How would you describe the most compelling reason(s) for local community to support the institution?
- Do you have any final thoughts or comments about Brevard College?

## Appendix C: Request for Participation in Benchmarking Project

Good Evening

I'm Quinton Walker, a Doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership and Policy Program at Vanderbilt University. Along with colleagues Anna Thomas and Erin Perez, we are charged with completing our capstone experience with Brevard College, a small liberal arts college in Western North Carolina. Akin to a dissertation, the Capstone, a year-long experience situated at the intersection of theory and practice, involves students partnering with an institution of higher learning to conduct original research anchored to a pressing organizational issue. Rather than being esoteric and unattached to the life of the practitioner, the capstone experience is firmly rooted in today's educational realities.

I write to inquire whether Alice Lloyd College would be willing to participate in a benchmarking study being conducted in conjunction with the Institutional Advancement office at Brevard College. This benchmarking study is one of three strands of research we are conducting for our Capstone project.

Members of the Appalachian College Consortium have been selected as targets for the benchmarking study. Your institution was selection given the transition from a two-year to four-year college during its history. The focus of our benchmarking study targets how institutions like yours work with alumni, whether you engage two and four-year alumni differently, and your best practices for alumni engagement and development.

Should you be willing to participate, we would welcome the opportunity to schedule a 15-20 minute phone call to speak to the topics enumerated above by February 17, 2014. We are happy to remove all identifying information from your college if you so desire for anonymity purposes

As an expression of gratitude, Brevard College has graciously agreed to share the final benchmarking study with all institutions that elect to participate. This report will be made available by the end of April 2014.

Thanks in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this opportunity. Do let us know when you would like to schedule a time to speak.

Best-

Quinton P. Walker  
Anna K. Thomas  
Erin C. Perez

**Investigators, Vanderbilt University**

## Appendix D: Benchmarking Interview Questions

### Themes and Questions To Prompt Discussion

- Definition of Alumni Standing
  - How does an institution define an alumnus?
  - Is an alumnus someone who holds a degree from an institution?
  - Alternatively, do they need to satisfy a minimum number of credit hours?
  
- Nature and Scope of Alumni Outreach
  - How frequently do institutions reach out to their alumni groups?
  - What methods do they use?
  - What is the nature of the content of the communication?
  
- Institutional Metrics used to Measure Success
  - What data does the institution collect to know that if its alumni affairs and advancement initiatives are successful?
  
- Presence and Organization of a Functioning Alumni Board
  - Is there an alumni board to increase involvement?
  - How is it structured?
  - How would the institution comment on the board's activity and effectiveness?
  
- Development / Alumni Linkages to Other Parts of the Institution
  - Does the Advancement / Alumni Affairs offices reach out to other institutional functions (e.g. admissions, academic affairs, and athletics?)
  - What inspires the outreach?
  
- The Role of Friends of the College
  - How does the college connect with the local community?
  - Is friend-making and friend-raising a component of the institution's development strategy?
  
- General Best Practices to Working with Alumni
  - What has the college found to be particularly effective in working with alumni?
  - What tactics have been used to work with a segmented alumni base?
  
- Additional Areas of Institutional Interest
  - What questions does the institution have for other similarly situated institutions?