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Fundraising Managers’ Perceptions of Online Education’s Influence on Fundraising Practices and Giving

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on Fundraising Practices and Giving

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Abstract

The influence of online education on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns is not well understood. This qualitative case study explored how fundraising managers perceived the impact of online education on higher education fundraising. To explore this phenomenon, the researcher interviewed fundraising managers at private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States, and reviewed publicly available documents on the participant schools fundraising and financial information. The interviews demonstrated that study participants were concerned about connecting with graduates of online programs, and perceived that online students may have less affinity for their alma mater than on-ground alumni. The fundraising managers interviewed reported that data on the giving patterns and the most effective strategies to engage online alumni are still emerging. Despite this lack of information, the fundraising managers interviewed believed that targeted, personalized solicitations may be the best way to engage and solicit funds from graduates of online programs.

Keywords: online education, fundraising, engagement, philanthropy, qualitative, nonprofit, affinity

Dedication

This work is dedicated with all my love to my wife Chase, and my sons Grant and Brady. May you always be well and enjoy the journey. Thanks for everything.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The history of higher education is inextricably linked to philanthropy. Without the generosity of private citizens, religious organizations, and other industries, U.S. colleges and universities would not be the massive enterprise that we know today. Modern philanthropy and education are both experiencing significant changes. As colleges and universities settle into the 21st century, demographic shifts and technological advances are disrupting their traditional business models and fundraising practices. Higher education enrollments are increasingly moving online, and the increase in online students is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, as noted by Clinefelter and Aslanian (2016).

Educational philanthropy is more necessary than ever as colleges and universities face changes in their student bodies and cuts in traditional funding sources, such as state and federal aid. Current studies on educational philanthropy are mostly geared towards residential, undergraduate college students, a population that is generally declining (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016). As the population of students taking some or all of their education at a distance increases, the need for information on the giving behaviors of online students grows. There is a need to determine if online students have different giving behaviors than traditional on-ground students.

This descriptive qualitative case study explored how fundraising managers perceive the impact of online students on educational fundraising practices and giving patterns. Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for answering questions related to the giving behaviors of online students because it allowed the researcher to interact with the subjects (in this case, fundraising managers) and involve them in the data collection (Creswell, 2003). This descriptive case study explored the perceptions of the fundraising managers rather than strictly looking for a causal factor to explain them (Yin, 2003). The study questions explored the perceptions of the fundraising managers and sought to uncover patterns in donor behaviors. The research questions also explored the engagement strategies that fundraisers employed with online students. Qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because changing student demographics and fundraising behaviors are contemporary questions, and the lived experiences of fundraising managers shed light on how giving behaviors are changing in the 21st century (Yin, 2003).

In this study the researcher employed the tools of qualitative research to explore how fundraising managers perceive the impact of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The researcher used multiple, semi-structured in person interviews, and a review of pertinent publicly available documents to explore how fundraising managers perceived the impact of online education on the giving behaviors of online students. The interviews also asked fundraising managers how they engaged students in online programs before and after they graduated.

Financial donations are an important source of revenue for colleges and universities (Association of American Universities, 2014). This study was important because as the demographics of colleges and universities change, fundraising managers may need to employ different engagement tools or fundraising strategies. Literature on this subject only recently began to consider whether traditional donor motivations are the same for online students. Currently there is not sufficient empirical evidence available on online student giving behaviors to guide the decisions of fundraising managers. This study explored the perceptions of fundraising managers on online education's impact on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns to add information to this subject.

Background

There are many reasons why alumni choose to give back to the institution they graduated from. Academic studies into donor motivation often contain demographic measures such as the gender, geographic location, income, and academic major of alumni who donate (Miller, 2013; Vineburgh, 2012). Religious background and perceptions of the institution's needs also impact giving behaviors (Weerts & Ronca, 2009). Other factors that impact giving behaviors, include: alumni status, emotional attachment to the institution, and a history of past giving (Borden, Shaker & Kienker, 2014; Lindahl & Winship, 1992; Nash, & Vaccarino, 2016).

Studies also demonstrated alumni are more likely to give if their institutions modeled philanthropic behaviors, inspired feelings of trust in students, and created a sense of belongingness to the college (Carvalho & de Oliveira, 2010; Miller, 2013; Strickland & Walsh, 2013). Collectively, these feelings of trust and belongingness are types of engagement that students have with their institution. Many of the engaging experiences in college are associated with the camaraderie of being together on campus (e.g. tailgating at football game, hearing a motivational campus speaker, late night talks in the library, etc.). However, these engaging experiences are not readily accessible to most online students. The literature on fundraising has not yet explored how online students, perhaps without fully engaging college experiences, will donate to their alma maters.

Empirical study into philanthropy is slowly developing. At the turn of the 21st Century, Lindahl and Conley (2002) claimed that the field of philanthropy lacked objective research and relied heavily on anecdotal feedback from practitioners. In the subsequent years, information about philanthropy, as it relates to education, has grown slowly. Authors and fundraising professionals have attempted to define and identify the chief characteristics of donors and have identified predictors of giving such as capacity and affinity (McAlexander, Koenig, & DuFault, 2016) and established alumni relationships (Gallo, 2012). There is agreement that the motivating factors for educational philanthropy are complex with many influences (Carvalho & de Oliveira, 2010; Miller, 2013; Strickand & Walsh, 2013). Furthermore, the evidence on alumni giving that is currently available focuses almost exclusively on *traditional* students, who are mostly residential and do not take online classes (Tiger & Preston, 2013). The giving behaviors of alumni from online programs are not well understood, and more information was necessary to inform higher education fundraising managers on how to solicit donations from this population.

Statement of the Problem

The number of students taking online classes is increasing (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016). Mack, Kelly, & Wilson (2016) noted, there were virtually no studies on critical fundraising topics such as fundraising effectiveness. Additionally, it was not known how higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. As the number of online students increases, fundraising practices may need to be evaluated to determine if giving patterns are different in alumni of online programs. The influx of online students provides opportunities and challenges to fundraising managers. Engagement and emotional attachment have been shown as important motivating factors for donation (Bernal & Mille, 2013). Online coursework provides different opportunities for the student to feel engaged with the institution than on-ground students. The techniques that fundraising managers are using to engage online students are not known, and are worthy of exploration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how education managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The researcher focused on fundraising managers at private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States. The researcher interviewed fundraising managers at institutions that are members of a nonprofit coalition with both on-ground and online programs, to gather their perceptions on the influence of online students in fundraising, and the opportunities and challenges they provide. Additionally, the researcher was interested in investigating whether fundraising managers utilized different methods to engage, and solicit donations from online alumni as compared to their on-ground counterparts. Collecting feedback from fundraising managers about their daily experiences soliciting donations from online alumni explored the gap in the research pertaining to online students and giving behaviors.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns?

RQ1a. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices?

RQ1b. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising giving patterns?

RQ1c. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on the relationship between alumni and the school?

RQ 2. What challenges and/or opportunities to fundraising do fundraising managers report as a result of the new cohort of online students?

RQ 3. What strategies are fundraising managers employing to engage online students before and after they graduate?

Significance of the Study

Recent analysis of student demographics suggested that while overall college attendance is experiencing a decrease, there is likely to be a slow and steady increase in the number of students taking courses online (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016). The literature on educational philanthropy is only beginning to address the giving behaviors of online students (Tiger & Preston, 2013). Fundraising managers can benefit from learning how their counterparts at different institutions are changing their fundraising practices to solicit donations from online alumni. As a result of this study, fundraising managers at colleges and universities may find new strategies for engaging students enrolled in online academic programs based on the techniques employed by their peer institutions. The researcher explored how online students are changing educational philanthropy, and this information may help educational institutions and fundraising managers to make more informed decisions on how to engage online alumni in fundraising campaigns. The researcher chose to explore this issue by focusing on a narrow and specific population of fundraising managers at private, nonprofit educational institutions in the western United States.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the course of this study, the researcher applied the following definitions to frequently used terms:

Fundraising manager. In this study, a fundraising manager referred to the person at a college or university with primary responsibility for fundraising activities at the institution, regardless of official job title.

Giving patterns. Giving Patterns are the frequency, size, and type of donations that alumni donated to their alma maters.

Fundraising practices. Fundraising practices are the techniques and strategies that fundraising managers employed to solicit donations from alumni.

Self-actualization. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, self-actualization is the ultimate in self-fulfillment- a realization of one's full potential (Maslow, 2013).

Crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is a means of raising small amounts of money online from a large number of people without any financial intermediaries, (Schatz, 2017).

Institutional terms. Throughout this study, the researcher used the terms *college, university, school,* and *institution* interchangeably. All of these terms refer to postsecondary educational institutions.

Limitations and Delimitations

Forces outside the researcher's control limit every research design. Every research design also has delimitations, or boundaries, that are put in place by the researcher. Analysis of the potential limitations helped the researcher anticipate weaknesses in the study, and the delimiting choices the researcher made helped to narrow the research topic (Creswell, 2003). This section discusses the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Limitations. One of the chief limitations of case study research design is the human fallibility inherent in the effort to collect the data (Yin, 2013). The researcher's analysis of the interviews was fundamentally subjective and may have had multiple interpretations. The researcher's use of purposeful sampling to choose fundraising managers to interview may not have been representative enough to fully answer the research questions. Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2015) noted that purposeful sampling is a strategic decision, and may limit the generalizability of the findings. The findings in this study are not broadly transferrable because the sample size was small, and not representative of all higher education institutions. Furthermore, the information derived from the schools that made up the study sample may not be relevant to other higher education institutions. Finally, the researcher had professional relationships with some of the research participants by virtue of his position in higher education. Professional affiliations with the research subjects were helpful in soliciting volunteers to participate, but could have led to potential bias in the analysis of data.

Qualitative research design is inherently limited because the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection (Yin, 2003). The method of qualitative research data collection held the potential for researcher bias to significantly impact the findings. In order to acknowledge and avoid bias, the researcher employed techniques described by experts in the field of qualitative research design.

Delimitations. The delimiting factors in this research design were largely chosen to ensure that the project could be completed in a reasonable timeframe and within resource constraints. Palinkas, et al. (2015) suggested that all sampling schemes should be feasible, efficient, and practical. Consequently, the sample institutions for this study were chosen because they were located within a manageable geographic distance for the researcher to conduct interviews. The researcher's employment situation at a private, nonprofit university provided connections within that segment of higher education and influenced the selection of the sample schools. As a result of this affiliation, the researcher chose not to include public or community colleges within the study sample.

The researcher acknowledged that the limitations and delimitations of the qualitative research design contained inherent weaknesses, which could bias the researcher's findings.

Proactively recognizing potential weaknesses and bias before the research was conducted helped the researcher consider methods to ensure validity, and credibility. The measures utilized to ensure validity and credibility are discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1 Summary

In this descriptive qualitative study, the researcher explored how increasing numbers of online students are impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. As student demographics change, and more students get degrees without physically attending a class, the researcher wanted to explore and describe how fundraising managers are attempting to engage online students and motivate them to donate back to their alma maters. The researcher investigated the intersection of online students and educational philanthropy using multiple, semi-structured interviews of fundraising managers, and a review of relevant documents.

Chapter 2 of this study delves into the literature on educational philanthropy, donor motivations, and contemporary fundraising methods to inform the study's conceptual framework. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the methodology employed in this descriptive qualitative case study. Chapter 4 of this study reports on the findings for each of the research questions. In the fifth and final chapter, the researcher draws conclusions based on the research findings, discusses the implications of those conclusions for higher education fundraising practices, and suggests possible avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Since its inception, higher education in the United States has been shaped by, and reliant upon the generosity of U.S. citizens. In addition to tuition, fees, and grant funding, charitable donations are one of the primary ways that colleges and universities fund their operations (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Speck, 2010). As noted by McCully (2015), the fields of philanthropy and education are both experiencing significant paradigm shifts driven by technology. One of the most significant shifts occurring in the higher education industry is the increase of students enrolled in online or hybrid programs (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016). The transition to more online coursework provides tremendous opportunities, and new challenges for higher education institutions. Despite these opportunities, the impact of increased numbers of online students on higher education philanthropy was not well known, and fundraising managers did not have robust information to help guide their decision-making processes.

In addition to online education, some of the significant changes facing colleges and universities include decreases in public funding, changes in student demographics, and changes in public attitudes toward the value of education (Watsyn, 2009). Despite these significant shifts, attitudes and behaviors related to education have not slowed the giving tendencies of Americans to colleges and universities. According to the “Giving USA” report by the nonprofit Giving Institute (2016), 2015 was the most philanthropic year in history, with nearly sixty billion dollars donated to educational institutions. Although the landscape for higher education fundraising is changing and challenging, colleges and universities have recently sought and received massive amounts of charitable donations.

Technology's influence on the classroom, and shifting giving behaviors are two factors rapidly changing the business model for the entire education industry. Online education has been steadily increasing over the years and its growth and popularity is changing student demographics across the country. Evaluation of the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) by Allen, Seaman, Poulin and Straut (2016) showed that the number of students enrolled in at least one distance-based course has continued to grow. As more students who have taken some or all of their programs online graduate and become alumni, it is possible that the traditional fundraising apparatus employed by colleges and universities may need to be revised or completely rethought.

As the demographics of college students shift and increasing numbers of students take some or all of their degrees online or in a blended format (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), the educational landscape is changing. Online education is increasing in popularity due to the convenience and availability of the internet and the increase of university's offering online programs (Alshahrani, Ahmed, & Ward, 2017). Scholarly studies into the philanthropic tendencies of graduates of online programs are only now being developed. This leaves fundraising offices without significant data to inform donor strategies for graduates of online programs (Thompson & Weiner, 2009). Additionally, the literature lacked information on how higher education fundraising managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns.

This issue matters because fundraising and private giving play an important role at modern universities (Barr & McClellan, 2010). Understanding how fundraising managers perceived a new generation of online students giving habits is key to informing the fundraising efforts of the future. The researcher's exploration of the perceptions of fundraising managers related to increased graduates of online programs, and the strategies used to engage this population, were important for explaining this under-reported phenomenon.

Online students may not experience higher education in the same way as on campus students. Online students' interactions with fellow students are mediated by technology, and their chances for incidental, social interaction are limited or non-existent. Critics of online education argue that important engagement aspects of education, such as face-to-face interactions, laboratory activities, internships, and clinical opportunities are not easily delivered online (Cooper & Sahami, 2013; Harder, 2013; McNutt, 2013; Shapiro, Lee, Wyman Roth, Çetinkaya-Rundel, & Canelas, 2017). Additionally, online students do not have access the traditional suite of university extra-curricular activities that create a rich experience and develop strong emotional ties. Feelings of emotional connectedness contribute to the likelihood that an alumnus will donate (Skari, 2014; Sung & Yang, 2009). Research also showed donors want to feel that the beneficiary of their gift is worthy of the investment (Watson, 2014). Current literature had little to say about how fundraising managers engaged online students to build feelings of connection and worthiness. Thus, there was a gap warranting exploration into how college fundraisers perceived these issues and developed relationships with students that they may never have met face to face.

Finding ways to connect with online students as they become alumni and motivating them to donate to their virtual alma maters is key because colleges and universities are becoming more reliant on philanthropy as a source of funding. At the same time that online education gained popularity, colleges and universities suffered setbacks to their financial status associated with the Great Recession. Drezner (2011) noted that university endowments decreased by as much as 30% during the recession in 2008. Many universities continue to struggle to recover from the financial difficulties of the early 21st century and many have not returned to the financial stability that they enjoyed prior to the crisis.

Another factor that impacts the bottom line for colleges and universities is enrollment. The most recent IPEDS report, from 2014–2015 indicated that although postsecondary enrollments are still higher than they were in the early 2000s, they peaked in 2010–2011 and have been gradually declining every year (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The overall decrease in postsecondary students means less tuition dollars and a greater strain on budgets. Clinefelter and Aslanian (2016) demonstrated that although overall college attendance is down, there has been steady growth in online enrollments. The growth in online students means that alumni of online and hybrid programs are likely to play a big role in the fundraising futures of colleges and universities. As colleges and universities continue to depend on donations from increasing numbers of online alumni to provide a non-tuition revenue source, more information about the giving patterns, preferences, and the most effective techniques for engaging online students and alumni was needed.

Chapter 2 discusses the gap in fundraising literature related to the giving behaviors of online students. This chapter also explores the historical foundations of fundraising in higher education from the colonial period through to modern times and describes the role of philanthropy in the U.S. educational system. The chapter reviews the available literature on the most common fundraising practices that universities utilize to solicit funds from alumni. Finally, Chapter 2 sets the stage for the investigation of the research questions and describes the methods utilized to study the problem.

Theoretical Framework

There was a relative paucity of information on the topic of fundraising in higher education (Drezner, 2011; Strickland, 2009), and an even smaller sample of studies aimed directly at online students. Given the lack of information on educational fundraising, and the recent increase in online education, approaching the research questions using a foundational and well-known study framework was appropriate. The hierarchy of needs theory, developed initially by Maslow (2013) provided such a foundational theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs forms the theoretical framework through which the study was undertaken.

Multiple theories explain what motivates the giving behaviors of higher education benefactors. Many studies focus on the engagement (Bernal & Mille, 2013) and relational exchanges between higher education employees and potential donors. While relational interactions certainly have bearing on a donor's willingness to give, Maslow argued certain *foundational conditions* must be met first before giving is possible. This study employed Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as a theoretical model to guide the research questions. Through the lens of Maslow's theory, the researcher sought to better understand how online education impacts the giving tendencies of students, and also investigated if colleges and universities are creating engaging environments for online students that are conducive to philanthropy. This information was explored by interviewing higher education fundraising managers to learn about how they perceived the impact of online students on their work.

Review of Research Literature

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (2013) claimed that human motivations, such as the motivation to give, fall into five hierarchical categories of need (see Figure 1). The researcher acknowledged that Maslow's theory is not universally applicable explaining the giving behaviors of all college and university alumni because giving is a complex, multifaceted action. The researcher also acknowledged that volunteerism, referrals, and positive promotion are types of giving behaviors that graduates of colleges and universities engage in beyond monetary donations, but did not choose to focus on them in this study. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was selected as a theoretical framework because it provided a well-known, simple framework from which to investigate the research questions.

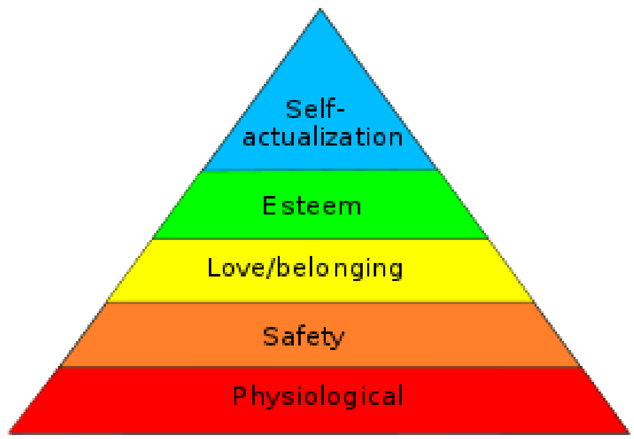

Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Wikipedia contributors, 2018).

The first level of Maslow's hierarchy includes physiological needs such as food and water (Maslow, 2013). In order to satisfy the second level safety needs, one needs to be free from physical danger and provided baseline essentials such as money and stable employment (Maslow, 2013; Pardee, 1990). The third level consists of social needs such as love, friendship, and acceptance in a group. The fourth level consists of ego or esteem needs, such as confidence, respect, and status (Maslow, 2013; Pardee, 1990). Maslow called the fifth and final level self-actualization, which he defined as the ultimate in self-fulfillment, and the realization of one's full potential (Maslow, 2013; Pardee, 1990).

Maslow's (2013) theory further claimed that the proposed needs were "organized in a hierarchy of relative prepotency" (p. 4). This meant that as lower needs (physiologic, safety) were met, they were replaced with a fresh *hunger* from a need in the next category (e.g. esteem). Maslow (2013) believed that human beings lived in a state of near perpetual longing for unfulfilled desires, and that those desires were constantly shifting based on current circumstances. The Hierarchy of Needs theory posited that physiologic needs are the most powerfully all-consuming, "For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interest exists but food. He dreams food, he remembers food…he perceives only food and wants only food" (Maslow, 2013, p. 3). Concerns about meeting safety needs can also consume one's life. A person acutely worried about her job security, for example, may not be able to dedicate sufficient energy toward social needs and relationships.

Maslow (2013) noted that modern society is typically safe for individuals and that in many cases the lowest levels of the hierarchy were typically met. Since safety is a subjective experience, and humans can develop a stress response to both actual and perceived threats, it is difficult to say if Maslow's assertion that most safety needs are satisfied in contemporary society. However, with unfortunate exceptions, it is likely that most modern students do not regularly experience persistent threats to their lives such as war, physical attack, or danger from wild animals.

As the contemporary world has become generally safer for greater numbers of individuals, more people have been able to address their higher-order requirements, beginning with Maslow's third level of love, affection, and belonging needs (2013). The third level of the hierarchy of needs is the first area where online education may be fundamentally at a disadvantage compared to traditional on-ground learning experiences. If the third level of the hierarchy is all about a desire for close relationships, and status within a group (Maslow, 2013), then online students, who may have little to no actual contact with their classmates or professors, may struggle to satisfy the demands of this level of the hierarchy. As discussed later, Maslow (1987) believed that philanthropic tendencies were only likely to occur in individuals who reached the fourth level of the hierarchy or above. The researcher explored the perceptions of fundraising managers on whether or not online students had a different giving relationship with their institutions compared to on-ground students.

If colleges and universities were providing for the base needs of their online alumni and also sought to connect with them at the higher levels of the hierarchy (levels four and five) they were putting the foundations in place that could lead to a stable fundraising base. From a practical standpoint, it does not really matter if alumni are donating from level four or level five motivations. Fundraising offices should tailor solicitations to appeal to broad swaths of donors.

Maslow described the needs at the fourth level of his hierarchy as the esteem needs, which include the desires for achievement, confidence, reputation, and prestige (Maslow, 2013). Maslow (2013) also noted that individuals who are having their esteem needs met are likely to desire to be useful and add value to the world. Fundraising managers can leverage this desire for utility and to contribute to society when soliciting donations.

Stage five individuals have also met the lower level threshold necessary for giving and have moved into what Maslow (1987) called a *self-actualized* state. According to Maslow (2013), self-actualizing people are not distracted by their emotional or physical wants, and therefore can experience joy, gratitude, and generosity. Alumni who have become self-actualized in their personal and professional lives may be positioned to express their gratitude and generosity to their institution in the form of donations. It was not known if online students had the same feelings of gratitude and generosity towards their online degree-granting institutions, or if they had the same giving behaviors of their on-ground peers.

Criticisms of Maslow. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has critics, and the validity of its claims are a matter of debate. Many critics have argued that Maslow's method was not empirical (Bouzenita & Boulanouar, 2016). Critics have noted that many individuals overcome unfulfilled lower needs to achieve states of being associated with higher levels in Maslow's hierarchy (Hoffman, 2008). Others have argued that the hierarchy of needs theory is too simplified and does not account for the messy, interconnected nature of actual human interactions (Denning, 2012). Another common complaint about Maslow's theory is that it is too based on observations of 1950's U.S. and consequently does not translate well into other cultures outside of the Westernized world (Bouzenita & Boulanouar, 2016).

Despite these criticisms, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is widely known and pervasive in the teachings of a variety of disciplines such as marketing, management, parenting, psychology, and education (Denning, 2012). The clean, understandable hierarchy of needs, frequently represented in a simple pyramid diagram, is well-known and has been operationalized in many of the disciplines mentioned previously (Bouzenita & Boulanouar, 2016). Loh, Wrathall, and Schapper (2017) commented that even though Maslow's hierarchy of needs had inherent structural flaws, "its relevance stems not from the feasibility of the theory, but from the 'usability' of the theory" (p. 21). The researcher chose to use Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the theoretical framework for this study precisely because of its simplicity and usability.

Historical foundations of philanthropy in higher education. In order to see where educational philanthropy in the United States may move to in the future, it was important to review its history. At the onset of a discussion about philanthropy's role in U.S. education, it is illustrative to note that two works, one by Sears, *Philanthropy in the History of American Higher Education* in 1922, and another that was published in 1965 by Curti and Nash, *Philanthropy in the Shaping of American Higher Education*, are still considered to be the definitive texts on the subject (Strickland, 2009; Trollinger, 2009). The continued relevance of the work of Sears, Curti, and Nash spoke not only to the quality of their scholarship, but also to the relative paucity of research on their subject.

Sears (1922) chose to break the history of philanthropy into three chronological segments, the Colonial Period, the Early National Period, and the Late National Period. Curti and Nash (1965) expanded upon Sears' work and brought the history of higher education philanthropy forward from the 1920s through to the 1960s. Trollinger (2009) suggested the addition of two additional eras: the Interwar Period from 1918-1945, and the Post-war Period that spanned from 1945 to roughly 2000 (pp. 47-48). Given the significant changes to higher education, most significantly the advent of online education, that have transpired since 2000, it is possible that a sixth, Early 21st Century Period of American philanthropy in higher education has begun. These different periods were a useful way to delineate the different phases of higher education and this study utilized them to break the historical record of philanthropy in higher education into manageable segments.

The colonial period. Curti and Nash (1965) related how America's oldest postsecondary institution was founded in 1636 in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and two years later took on the name of its initial benefactor, an English colonist named John Harvard. Upon his death in 1638, Harvard left his library of approximately three hundred books and half of his estate to the school that would bear his name (Curti & Nash, 1965; Harvard University, n.d.). Harvard's gift at the inception of American higher education bonded the enterprise to private philanthropy in a manner that continues today. The establishment of Harvard set the stage for the incorporation of nine other colonial colleges between 1836 and the onset of the Revolutionary War (Trollinger, 2009). These colleges, and the students that they trained, helped to establish a class of Americans influenced by, but distinct from their English ancestors- and created a uniquely American institution.

In order to survive in the New World, colleges needed to rely on the generosity of others, and to diversify revenue streams to include tuition and funds raised. The early colonial colleges subsisted on gifts from a variety of sources, including municipalities, churches, and private citizens (Sears, 1922). Frequently these early gifts were not monetary (actual cash was scarce in the colonies), but often consisted of tools, furniture, livestock, and books (Sears, 1922). Within the early interactions between colonial Americans and colonial colleges, “Motivations for giving were instilled in the citizenry, basic patterns of fundraising on behalf of colleges were established, and some of the ground rules for the nature of the relationship that should exist between colleges and donors were set” (Trollinger, 2009, p. 49). Sears (1922) noted that of the nine colonial colleges, with the partial exception of William and Mary, philanthropy was an expected source of operational revenue. The symbiotic relationship between education and philanthropy that started with John Harvard solidified and became entrenched during the colonial era of American higher education. This study explored how the patterns of philanthropy established during colonial times were influenced by increased online educational delivery methods.

The early national period. The years following the American Revolution saw higher education grow in fits and starts, with periods of rapid progress interspersed with periods of budgetary scarcity. America was developing into a nation at a time of great scientific discovery and advancement of knowledge, and its universities were responding to the times. Scientific discovery and an evolving business culture in the new nation began to influence the curricula of colleges, and influence the gifts that schools received (Sears, 1922). This period of time, which lasted roughly through 1865, saw the development of the first schools of medicine, law, and theology, as well as women's colleges and the first trade schools in the United States (Sears, 1922). As the programmatic offerings of colleges became more focused, so too did the donations that were received. This period of philanthropy in higher education was the first significant era of gifts that came with restrictions as to their usage, as opposed to funds that could be spent by the school at will. This era saw the divestment of England from U.S. higher education, and an increase of donations from religious orders (Sears, 1922).

This period saw the beginning of the first State colleges, and a vast number of colleges came into existence. While many thrived, there were many more that did not. State support was minimal, and the farther that the college was from the eastern seaboard, the more difficult it was to find concentrated wealth that could be counted upon to support a school on a permanent basis (Curti & Nash, 1965; Sears, 1922). Securing multiple streams of income was critical and as Curti and Nash described, "The successful colleges found a single wealthy benefactor, obtained money abroad, collected a large subscription, or were taken under the patronage of a state or city" (1965, p. 45). The creativity necessary for finding multiple revenue streams also spread into the curricular and organizational structures of the post-revolutionary colleges. As the educational landscape shifts in the twenty-first century, fundraising professionals are again asked to seek new forms of philanthropy, increasingly from alumnae of online programs.

The late national period. The period that Sears (1922) dubbed the *Late National Period* spanned roughly 1865-1918 and was a period of substantial growth in higher education, much of it supported by philanthropy. As the American Civil War ended and the United States began to take the shape that it continues to hold today, citizens from all over the country began to seek educational opportunities at a variety of different schools.

As philanthropy increased its reach into higher education, state and federal support for the educational enterprise also began to increase (Sears, 1922). The Late National period also saw the beginning of national oversight in higher education, with the formation of what would become today's Department of Education (ED) in 1867. The ED was created to gather information on teaching and learning that could be used to improve education in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). One of the early functions of the Department of Education was to collect reports on the philanthropic activities of U.S. educational institutions.

Another significant federal investment in higher education was the Morrill Act of 1862, which although technically occurred in the Early National Period, but primarily created benefits in the decades following (The Library of Congress, n.d.). Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law on July 2, 1862 and it provided each state with federal land that the states could sell and use the proceeds used to fund public postsecondary institutions. More than fifty colleges and universities were created by these land grants, including Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and numerous state and agricultural schools (Library of Congress. n.d.).

As the fortunes of some Americans, such as the Rockefeller family, reached unprecedented heights, and as the number of private and land grant universities expanded, the complexity of fundraising and donation management increased. Early colonial colleges could pass a hat around the church, or write a private letter to a wealthy benefactor in order to secure a donation, but at the dawn of the twentieth century large colleges and rich philanthropists did not have the luxury of such intimate arrangements. In response to the intricacies of the new philanthropic world, institutional foundations were set up. Foundations were administrative divisions that could manage philanthropic relations, business strategies, and large-scale giving campaigns. At this point, philanthropic donors and the foundations they created recognized that with vast sums of money they could profoundly influence the direction of existing colleges- thus reducing the need for continued expansion in the educational sector (Curti & Nash, 1965). The transition from starting new colleges to the support and influencing of existing colleges (or academic disciplines within a college) changed the conditions that typically came with a donation. Instead of focusing on maintaining the status quo at an institution, many donors came to view their gifts as transformational tools that helped to move the institution forward (Trollinger, 2009). This spirit of philanthropy-fueled change profoundly influenced the way that institutions sought out donations, and how they chose to prioritize the funds collected.

There is evidence that these new donors viewed their gifts as vehicles for significant institutional change, and the concept of the *transformational gift* to an institution is beginning to gain traction as a research topic (Trollinger, 2009; see also Gallagher, 2014; Skari, 2014). Across philanthropy in general, donors wanted to see their contributions make an impact. In cases of very large bequests, donors want to see their gifts cause a dramatic change in the operations, impact, or prestige of the organization that they contributed to. This study investigated whether fundraising managers perceived that online students giving behaviors are the same as more traditional student populations.

The interwar period. The early 20th century (1918-1945) saw a significant change in the educational fundraising as the profession of philanthropy began to mature and the influence of business overtook the religious overtones that dominated the Colonial and National periods. The 1910's were the first period in U.S. philanthropy where universities implemented systematic approaches that resembled business plans to raise funds (Worth & Asp, 1994). This period was the beginning of the *professional-ization* of the fundraising process, and trained professionals began to enter into the profession, replacing church leaders, laymen, and college employees.

Fundraising managers brought business-like processes to the universities that they partnered with, keeping detailed records of donations, training university presidents on solicitation techniques, and generally keeping the operation on schedule (Cutlip, 1990). The early twentieth century was also the first time that higher education employed fundraising techniques such as matching gifts. The complexity of these types of campaigns began to require full time management and attention, much more so than when the college president would simply head to the church after Sunday services to pick up the school's share of the collections. Colleges and universities came to depend heavily on increasingly sophisticated fundraising efforts during this period. The combination of G.I. Bill funding resulting from the end of World War II and maturing university philanthropic operations created massive growth in higher education in the Post-war Period. Just as the G.I. Bill radically changed education and giving patterns in the 1940s to1960s, online education has had a similar impact on colleges and universities today. Therefore, there is a need for this study to determine how alumni of online programs will relate to their former schools and whether their giving behaviors will mirror that of the Interwar Period.

The Post-war Period. In preparation for the end of World War II, Congress passed a bipartisan bill called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill. The bill was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt with the hopes that it would prevent a second depression when 15 million men and women who were serving in the armed-forces returned to the country, largely without jobs (Ourdocuments.gov). The G.I. Bill provided federal aid to help veterans return to civilian life, and this included paying for education (Ourdocuments.gov, n.d.). The resulting influx of new students had a staggering impact on the number, size, and diversity of colleges and universities in America. According to Ourdocuments.gov (n.d.), approximately 8 million veterans received educational benefits in the first seven years following the end of World War II, and the number of American's with a college degree more than doubled between 1940 and 1950. Many universities expanded during this period, and many new schools formed to meet the increased demand.

The 1980s and 1990s were a period where fundraising in higher education began to slowly turn into a *profession* that had established norms, professional organizations, regulations, and a developing body of research. Worth and Asp (1994) described higher education philanthropy in the early 1990s in the following terms:

> Recent years have seen the growth of a substantial professional literature, formalized training programs for development officers, and attempts at establishing a formal code of ethics. In earlier decades, development officers could learn their trade only through experience or the tutelage of a senior practitioner (p. 10).

As previously noted, the earliest American schools were private institutions, and public colleges and universities developed after, and in the model of, private schools. Because public institutions relied most heavily on public dollars or land grants to fund their operations, many state colleges and universities did not initially create robust fundraising departments. However, as state support began to decrease during recessions in the 1980s and 1990s, public universities began to enter into fundraising and development earnestly. The entry of public colleges into the fundraising landscape has created a more competitive market and reinforced the need for development to be an expert-driven field, not an amateur effort. Today, virtually all colleges and universities have some sort of department devoted to fundraising, and some large universities have development staffs numbering in the hundreds (Worth & Asp, 1994). Even with a large fundraising apparatus in place at many higher education institutions, it remains unknown how the emerging population of alumni from online degree programs will respond to fundraising requests.

The Early 21st Century Period. Educational philanthropy in the new millennium has undergone a significant shift, along with the educational industry as a whole. The Great Recession of the mid to late 2000s struck a significant blow to the investment portfolios of many postsecondary education institutions (Drezner, 2011). Health care costs, inflation and decreasing numbers of students attending college have cut into revenue streams and forced colleges and universities to steadily increase tuition to keep pace- all the while transitioning more of the burden of paying for school onto students and their families. Additionally, today's students are vastly different than students of the past- with increasing numbers taking some or all of their education online (Allen, et al., 2016). All of these demographic and financial pressures made philanthropic giving more important for educational institutions. As colleges and universities faced pressure to maintain diverse revenue streams, the giving behaviors of online students were unknown. In response to these unknowns, this study explored how fundraising managers perceived changes in the giving behaviors of graduates of online programs, and the techniques they used to engage online students and alumni.

Although the changes to the education landscape are challenging, there are also tremendous fundraising opportunities for universities to capitalize upon. The new millennium has been called the *golden age of philanthropy* (Strickland, 2009), and research indicates that

2015 was the most generous year in U.S. philanthropic history- with more than $370 billion dollars of donations generated (The Giving Institute, 2016; Giving USA, 2016). This increased rate of giving, and new technological advances driven by the proliferation of mobile computing provided colleges and universities with the potential to reach a new generation of philanthropists with new, easy to use tools. The stakes for colleges and universities are high, but the financial rewards of the twenty-first century are greater than they have ever been before.

The Fundamentals of Fundraising. Fundraising and higher education have been closely connected since the first universities were founded in America. In the early days colleges and universities sought individual patrons to fund operations, or gathered donations from the members of a church (Sears, 1922, Curti & Nash, 1965). Although soliciting donations to support the operations of an institution is foundational to the American educational enterprise, empirical study of charitable giving patterns, behaviors, and motivations was not commonplace until the 1980s (Whillans, 2016). For the bulk of the 20th Century, philanthropy was not a discipline that was formally studied at any major university in the country. According to Katz (1999), "in 1983 there was only one major research center dedicated to the study of philanthropy—the Program on Non-Profit Organizations at Yale University" (p. 78). This lack of formalized study has slowly changed and now there are multiple academic programs focused on studying charitable giving. Educational philanthropy is a niche within the overall study of charitable giving, and because widespread online education is a relatively recent development in the history of education, there is a gap in the literature relating to fundraising and online students.

As the study of philanthropy has developed and matured, researchers have worked to identify fundamental skills and attributes that contribute to successful fundraising campaigns. Interdisciplinary teams of researchers from the fields of economics, sociology, psychology and history are looking into various aspects of philanthropy (Katz, 1999). Whillans (2016) noted, "learning about the science of philanthropy can help guide best practice around crafting charitable appeals, recontacting donors and creating annual campaigns that produce the best returns on investment" (p. 5). Although scientific knowledge of philanthropy is growing, much of the investigation is focused on gathering baseline information on donors such as gender, academic major, age, geography, and so on. (Vineburgh, 2012). Advanced studies into the motivations and attitudes of donors are minimal in philanthropy in general, even less so in educational philanthropy studies, and almost nonexistent for alumni of online programs.

The next section explores the fundamental strategies employed by higher education fundraising managers. The chapter then describes donor motivations, and traditional fundraising methods employed by development offices in higher education. This section also includes a focus on emerging fundraising methods, largely based on technology, which may appeal to alumni of online programs.

Fundraising strategies. Fundraising campaigns at colleges and universities frequently begin with the solicitation of a *leadership contribution* that can be used to leverage other donors to make contributions (Rondeau & List, 2008). Leadership contributions often take the form of either a matching gift or a challenge gift. A matching gift is the conditional promise from a leadership donor to match the contributions of others at a certain rate up to a predetermined maximum amount (Rondeau & List, 2008). Matching gifts are frequently used by nonprofit organizations to build upon a corporate gift or grant funding (Weinger, n.d.). There is mixed literature on whether matching or challenge gifts are the most effective tools for motivating other donors, but general agreement that there is not enough empirical evidence to draw definitive conclusions (Rondeau & List, 2008; Eckel & Grossman, 2002).

The solicitation of the leadership gift(s) and other subsequent fundraising efforts at colleges and universities typically fall into two broad categories, in-person solicitation, and mass solicitation. If an institution is negotiating a large donation from a wealthy individual or corporate partner, the solicitation process is almost always of the personal nature. These personal donation pleas often come from the president, a member of the board of trustees, or another high-ranking official. Mass-solicitation of large groups of alumni, business, or other potential donors are engaged by universities as well, with the expectation to bring in large numbers of small to medium-sized gifts. Most large-scale fundraising campaigns at a college or university will be a combination of personal and mass fundraising techniques.

In-person gifts. In-person fundraising appeals can either be done in a very private, one-on-one fashion, or in a large, group setting such as homecoming. Most colleges and universities engage in both types of in-person fundraising activities. The intimate, personal discussions are often related to very large gifts and typically the college president is closely involved. Hodson (2010) noted, "the university president shoulders the ultimate responsibility for the success of the fundraising program" (p. 40).

In-person gifts also come in the form of smaller, event-related solicitations. Colleges and universities frequently hold benefit dinners, speakers, exhibitions, and other events to draw people to the school and get them to make a small or medium-sized contribution. Other examples of large-scale in-person fundraising appeals include: raffles, auctions, and the sale of various items with the proceeds going to the school.

Mass fundraising campaigns. In addition to personalized approaches, most colleges and universities engage in mass fundraising campaigns that may last multiple years (Drezner, 2011). Mass fundraising campaigns often employ various solicitation modes such as mailings, phone calls, and emails. Frequently, these campaigns are designed to raise money for the university's endowment or to generate unrestricted funds that can be spent at the discretion of the institution (Gitlow & Gitlow, 2014). Other mass fundraising campaigns are built into university magazines and alumni newsletters, which typically contain an envelope or reference to a webpage so alumni can easily contribute. Finally, fundraising email campaigns can be linked to videos and other media on the university's webpage that describe the effort and engage the prospective donor in a way that is similar to the alumni magazine, but more interactive.

The development officer. At most colleges and universities, a development officer manages both personal and large-scale fundraising operations. According to Trollinger, "In the 1920s Northwestern University coined the name 'Development Office' to reflect the continuous nature of the work of identifying, cultivating, and soliciting prospective donors…as they moved away from episodic efforts to raise funds" (2009, p. 70). Most colleges and universities today have at least one employee dedicated to fundraising, and some larger schools have entire departments that focus continuously on development activities. The expansion of the development officer's role has occurred gradually over the past twenty years, likely corresponding with the maturation of the overall profession of philanthropy. The fundraising profession began to have standardized requirements for development professionals in 2001, with the founding of Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) International (Certified Fund Raising Executive International, n.d.). As industry credentials became available, the duties and responsibilities of the development officer became more standardized. Although the role of development is becoming more formalized, the role of the development officer is still evolving and being incorporated at many institutions (Tull & Kuk, 2012). There is minimal information available on the role of the development officer in relation to the increase of online students.

Summary of the fundamentals of fundraising. Fundamental fundraising skills are still relevant. As the higher education landscape changes, with more online and fewer *traditional* college students, many of the skills employed by development officers will remain the same-however the tools they use to deploy those skills may shift. Fundraising managers will still be called upon to make personalized solicitations to alumni, corporate, and private donors. Fundraising managers will also be called upon to coordinate large-scale mass fundraising appeals to a wide audience. Perhaps the greatest challenge that the contemporary fundraising manager will need to tackle is determining what will motivate the 21st Century alumnus to donate. The following section of this study will examine the literature related to donor motivations, specifically focusing on identifying motivations that may be altered by, or specific to, graduates of online or hybrid educational programs.

Donor motivations. Academic studies into the motivations of donors frequently focus on quantitative measures such as the gender, geographic location, income, and academic major of alumni who donate to their alma mater (Miller, 2013; Vineburgh, 2012). The alumni's religious background, and perceptions of the institution's needs also impact giving behaviors (Weerts & Ronca, 2009), and the tax benefits associated with giving are also a factor. Studies have shown alumni are more likely to give if their institutions model philanthropic behaviors (Strickand & Walsh, 2013), inspire feelings of trust in students (Carvalho & de Oliveira, 2010), and create a sense of belongingness (Miller, 2013).

The motivating factors for educational philanthropy are not well understood and motivations for giving are case by case. The limited evidence shows that donor motivation is a complex subject with many influences. The giving behaviors of alumni from online programs are not well understood, and more information is necessary to inform higher education fundraising managers on how to solicit donations from this population.

Maslow's lower needs and giving behaviors. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, individuals are only capable of generosity and philanthropy after they have met the three lower order needs of the hierarchy (1987). From a fundraising standpoint, if an alumnus does not have stable housing or access to food (level one in the Maslow's hierarchy), or does not have the security of a regular paycheck (level two), she will not be likely to donate. The third level of Maslow's hierarchy, the *love needs* must also be satisfied before feelings of generosity develop. Individuals who have not found a satisfactory way to both give and receive love will be too preoccupied with their own internal *lovesickness* to give to others (2013).

Maslow's upper levels and giving behaviors. The fourth and fifth levels of Maslow's hierarchy, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, are related to conditions that have been found to correlate with donor giving. Maslow (2013) described the esteem needs as "The desire for reputation or prestige…recognition, attention, importance or appreciation" (p. 7). For the purposes of this study, esteem needs are related to satisfying educational and social relationships between the school and the student. Studies have shown that students who meaningfully connect with their institution through close relationships, or activities (both academic and social) are more likely to be academically successful and give back to their institution upon graduation (Skari, 2014). Other authors have demonstrated that engagement, activities and relationships lead to satisfaction and donations:

> The most important determinant of alumni giving is the individual's satisfaction with his or her undergraduate experience; those who are satisfied tend to make larger donations. Participation in extracurricular activities, such as student government, intercollegiate

> athletics, and fraternities, are also correlated with alumni giving. Similarly, individuals who contact faculty members outside of class or have contact with campus staff make higher average donations than those who [sic] without these experiences. (Sung & Yang, 2009, p. 790)

In light of the importance of engagement, activities, social interaction, and recognition on donation behaviors, it is important that universities create opportunities to meet what Maslow (2013) would call the internal and external *esteem needs* of their alumni. Internal esteem needs include intrinsic feelings of adequacy and confidence at the accomplishment of a rigorous, worthwhile educational process. External esteem needs are experiences of praise and recognition from the institution at various milestones in a degree program. While it is generally easy to call to mind examples of esteem needs being met in residential university settings- awards banquets, sporting events, campus speakers, etc., there are fewer immediate examples of esteem needs being met in online coursework. This may be particularly true for external esteem needs. It was not well understood how universities are engaging with online students and catering to their esteem needs.

Maslow (2013) claimed that individuals who had achieved *self-actualization,* the fifth level of the hierarchy of needs, were "basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness" (p. 8). Maslow (2013) spoke primarily of self-actualized individuals becoming the most ideal version of themselves through artistic and athletic examples, but also described how any effort to generate self-satisfaction may be a demonstration of self-actualized behavior. It was not clear if students claimed that self-actualization resulted from their interactions with their institutions. The interactions that students have with professors and staff at the institution, as well as the sense of inclusion in the community may also have contributed to reaching the self-actualized state. Miller (2013) showed that a sense of belonging to the group, and opportunities to engage with other classmates increased loyalty and donations in non-traditional student populations.

Feelings of trust and loyalty are important predictors of giving behaviors, and also associated with Maslow's (2013) upper level needs. Violations in trust between the institution and alumni may be particularly harmful to donor behaviors. Carvalho and de Oliveira (2010) found that alumni who perceived that their educational institution always acted in their best interest were more loyal to the school than alumni who did not believe in the institution's motivations. Additionally, students who trusted that their institution's employees were competent and empowered to solve issues that arose were more trusting and loyal to their alma maters (Carvalho & de Oliveira, 2010). Hartman and Schmidt (1995) showed that students felt more satisfied when they perceived the quality of their education was high and the interactions with university employees were positive.

Failure to ensure that alumni are engaged and feel positively about the institution when they graduate erodes trust and may hurt future fundraising efforts. As online education increases, it is important to determine what institutional behaviors contribute to online alumni engagement and trust, and what behaviors erode trust. Educational institutions have a vested interest in ensuring that alumni of their online programs trust that the school dealt with them fairly and equally to the on-ground students. It is also important that online students have engaging experiences and have been given opportunities to belong to some form of community within the institution.

Capitalizing on donor interests. Although Maslow's hierarchy explained some of the reasons that people give to colleges and universities, it is not universally applicable. In some cases, individuals simply give to things that they are interested in, or passionate about. Alumni who love football donate to the athletics department, and alumni who are passionate about literature donate to the library. The challenge for higher education institutions is to find these passionate donors and demonstrate that the institution's mission resonates with the donor's passion. Once the connection between the school and the donor has been established, the fundraising tools employed to engage this type of donor are similar to the tools used by other nonprofit organizations. Successful higher education fundraising managers are able to listen to the prospective donor's story, gain their confidence and support, and then convert the donor's passion for an idea or project into a financial investment. "A sizeable gift usually does not occur until enthusiasm, confidence and trust are present in the donor. Thus, the…university fund raiser must have the characteristics of instilling enthusiasm, trust and confidence" (Hermann & Hermann, 1996, p. 6). Again, trust plays an important role- the donor must trust that the fundraising manager and the university have the best intentions and the integrity to ensure that the gift will be managed appropriately.

Summary of donor motivations. People give to higher education institutions for a variety of reasons. Passion for an academic subject or the mission of their alma mater motivates some donors. Factors such as age, gender, religion, college major, other philanthropic activities, and wealth help predict the likelihood of alumni gifts (Ryan, 1990; Skari, 2014; Vineburgh, 2012). In other cases, the alumni's perception of the university's reputation motivates a donor (Sung & Yang, 2009). Alumni who have spouses or children who are also graduates of the same school are more likely to give (Okunade & Berl, 1997). Some alumni give out of a feeling of gratitude for the institution's contribution to their livelihood. Regardless of motivation, donors likely have satisfied the first three levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and have reached a place of stability that allows them to give back. Research also indicated that educational philanthropists have positive feelings of trust toward the institution and feel as though they belong to the university community.

The empirical information and theories to ground higher education fundraising practices are still developing (Drezner, 2011). Increasing numbers of students are attending colleges and universities online (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016). As the demographics of higher education shift, and more students attend university online from a distance, it was important for higher education fundraising managers to begin to investigate the motivations and donor habits of the new student population. Further study into how to meet Maslow's lower level needs, and create the conditions for philanthropy in online students was needed.

Educational fundraising in the new millennium. As previously discussed, fundraising in higher education is moving out of the Post-War Period (Trollinger, 2009) and into a new era of 21st century philanthropy. The proliferation of information technology, the rise of online education, and shifting student demographics (McCully, 2015) directly impact the fundraising practices of higher education development offices. The Internet provides educational fundraisers opportunities to "reduce costs, raise awareness, reach new and larger audiences, and mobilize visitors for certain causes or programs of action" (Nash & Vaccarino, 2016, p. 5).

The abundance of information and the ease at which it can be harvested to inform fundraising decisions significantly impacts the strategies that can be used to solicit donors. Data analysis, crowdfunding, and social media campaigns, are recent fundraising developments that impacted higher education philanthropy. Because all of these tools are delivered through, or mediated by technology, it is plausible that they would appeal to alumni of online degree programs. This section of the study describes several 21st century fundraising tools.

Data analysis. Online giving programs and sophisticated software make it possible for higher education fundraising managers to analyze donations made by alumni and gain greater insights into their giving patterns. Universities that have large amounts of data on their alumni's giving habits can use this information to predict which of their alumni are most likely to donate. Le Blanc and Rucks (2009), used a sample of almost 33,000 alumni records, and clustered alumni into one of six giving groups (ranging for very generous to non-donors) with 98% accuracy. Another study by Weerts and Ronca (2009) demonstrated the ability to predict the giving behaviors of alumni based on their answers to a series of questions related to income, experience with the school, and the level of engagement with the school after graduation. Universities and colleges with large, established fundraising departments and alumni networks have a distinct advantage using predictive analytics based on sample size. As Le Blanc and Rucks noted, "extracting meaningful patterns from large quantities of information, is useful in any field in which there are large quantitate of data and something worth knowing…is worth more than the cost to discover [the information]" (2009, p. 65). Data analysis benefits larger schools that keep sophisticated records of donors. Schools that are new to fundraising, or small colleges and universities may struggle to meaningfully utilize their data. Regardless of the sophistication of the institution, or the size of their alumni pool, none of the studies referenced specifically mentioned or accounted for graduates of online programs. Although the amount of information on the charitable behaviors grows, (particularly at large, established schools), there is no clear data on the giving patterns of online alumni.

Crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is a major development in the field of philanthropy in the 21st century. Companies like Kickstarter, Gofundme, and Indiegogo sprang up in the wake of the 2012 Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act. The JOBS Act relaxed securities regulations and allowed small businesses greater access to securing capital (Knight, 2016; Schatz, 2017). The relaxation of these securities rules allows small businesses to solicit funds from many sources with little or no regulation. The JOBS Act, coupled with the spread of the Internet paved the way for a new form of fundraising- crowdfunding. Schatz (2017) described crowdfunding as a method for soliciting small donations from large numbers of donors without a financial intermediary. This model of seeking more frequent, smaller donations, is beginning to be adopted in higher education to supplement operational funds (Colasanti, Frondizi, & Meneguzzo, 2018).

Because online crowdfunding campaigns are a relatively new concept in philanthropy the body of empirical knowledge on the subject is still developing. There is even less information available about how crowdfunding is impacting higher education fundraising. The Internet-driven and mobile-friendly nature of modern crowdfunding may be a useful tool for soliciting donations from the emerging online alumni population and further investigation into the interaction between online alumni and crowdfunding is warranted.

Social media fundraising campaigns. Colleges and universities utilize social media to reach students and alumni, and share information with a diverse array of constituents. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are among the most common communications tools used by most colleges and universities. Communicating with alumni and other potential donors is an important component of any fundraising campaign, and social media is a natural fit for fundraising outreach. Given that graduates of online or hybrid academic programs are necessarily adept at using online communication tools, it was worth studying their behaviors to find if social media fundraising techniques were effective in compelling them to give.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) claimed that there are different types of social media differentiated by their characteristics: “collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds” (p. 59). Wikipedia is an excellent example of social media as a collaborative project. Contributing Wikipedia authors from all over the world help to create informative content that is (theoretically) better than the content from a single author (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While collaborative project building social media sites like Wikipedia © may not have a direct application for fundraising managers, interesting user-generated content of this sort may draw prospective donors to the university’s website. Another form of social media, *blogs,* are similar to collaborative projects, but the content that is produced is typically done by a single individual. In a blog, the social interaction occurs when readers share and make comments on content. Universities regularly utilize blogs to reach out to students, and Wiki-like tools disseminate research and scholarly works. There was little research indicating how these social media tools are leveraged for fundraising among online alumni, and further exploration was necessary.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identified virtual gaming and virtual social worlds as two other types of social media. While a direct use of virtual worlds in the promotion and branding of higher education institutions may not be immediately evident, the impact that video game culture has on social media delivery is significant. By some estimates, there are as many as 1.8 billion video game players worldwide (mygaming.co.za, 2016). The video game industry, and the virtual worlds that are created through this industry are a factor in the lives of many would-be college attendees. There was little scientifically studied information on how college and universities utilize the social media functions of virtual worlds for any purpose, let alone fundraising, but there was limited research showing an increase in in-game advertising and marketing techniques (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Content communities such as YouTube, Flickr, and Spotify, are social media platforms that allow for the sharing of various types of media content (videos, music, photos, presentations, etc.) Content communities are frequently linked with another of Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) social media types, the social networking site. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn allow users to generate their own content and to share content from sites like YouTube- effectively creating their own online persona or profile.

Institutional use of social networking sites such as Twitter typically focused on disseminating information to a broad audience with the intention of carefully shaping the college's brand (Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014). Universities frequently created content in the form of YouTube videos and then shared them on Facebook, Twitter, etc., leveraging multiple social media platforms to market themselves and reinforce their brand identity. Some research showed that universities failed to utilize social networking sites as a two-way communication tool, instead simply focusing on sending out unidirectional marketing messages (Bélanger, et al., 2014). From a fundraising standpoint, unidirectional messaging is useful for making potential donors aware of a campaign or fundraising need. However, there may be untapped potential for engaging donors in a conversation (or *sales pitch*) through a conversational dialogue using Twitter or Facebook. Further exploration into how these social media tools impact the giving behaviors of 21st century alumni was warranted.

Summary of educational fundraising in the 21st century. The professions of education and philanthropy have undergone significant changes to their business models and operations in conjunction with the proliferation of the Internet. New technological tools are being developed alongside an ever-increasing group of online students. The impact of these two technology driven trends on educational fundraising is not yet well understood.

Online students are often separated geographically from their institution, and may not develop the strong social bonds associated with the third level of *love, affection, and belongingness needs* in Maslow's hierarchy (2013). Failure to satisfy belongingness needs in online students may prohibit their reaching the fourth level (esteem needs) of the hierarchy of needs, which is generally considered the lowest level at which giving behaviors are possible (Maslow, 1987; 2013). It is possible that the inclusion of data analysis, crowdfunding and social media tools may help to connect online students to the institution and create an important opportunity for a sense of engagement, belonging, and connection.

Through systematic data analysis, it is possible for institutions to identify likely donors from the ranks of their alumni (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2009). Additionally, most colleges and universities are already utilizing social media, and other technologies to market themselves, cultivate brand identity, and communicate with constituent groups (Bélanger, Bali, & Longden, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kimmons, Veletsianos, & Woodward, 2017). It was not known if a combination of data analysis and social media driven marketing contributed to a sense of engagement and connection for online alumni. The impact and attractiveness of crowdfunded campaigns in higher education is also largely under-studied. This study explored how higher education fundraising managers perceived the impact of online programming on fundraising practices and giving patterns, and how they worked to engage this new demographic of college alumni.

The educational landscape is changing rapidly. In their book about disruptive technologies in higher education, Christensen and Eyring (2011) described online education as the first significant disruption to the status quo of the university since the invention of the printed textbook. As the speed and accessibility of the Internet has expanded to reach more people, there has been an increase in the number of students taking some or all of their postsecondary education online. Clinefelter and Aslanian (2016) reported that there are 3.5 million students working on online degrees in 2016 and by 2020 that number will grow to about 5 million. The alumni of the very near future will increasingly be alumni of online programs and their giving habits were not known.

Technology has impacted fundraising operations too. Fundraising has only recently become a formalized profession with standards and general regulations (Worth & Asp, 1994). The nonprofit sector is lagging behind the commercial sector in the implementation of online fundraising technology adoption (Hudson, 2011). Despite the slower pace of technology adoption, fundraising managers, including those in the educational sector, are increasingly utilizing data to improve their decision making and solicitation strategies.

Technology has enabled fundraising managers to better understand what motivates donors to give. Fundraising managers now know that alumni who have a high level of trust in the institutional personnel and the effectiveness of university management are more willing to donate (Carvalho & de Oliveira, 2010). Research also informs fundraising managers that institutional reputation is key to helping coax donors into giving (Gallagher, 2014; Moore, 2014). Furthermore, universities with established fundraising operations and organized donor records, can now use software to look at aggregate giving behaviors and target their donor recruitment efforts to the most receptive audience (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2009).

Fundraising managers are much more sophisticated in their solicitations than they were ten years ago. Information about donor motivations and the statistical likelihood that a donor will give to a campaign help improve the fundraising process. In addition to these more targeted donor profiles, fundraising managers also have 21st century giving platforms such as crowdfunding and social media websites to utilize when reaching out to potential philanthropists.

Technology is changing the way colleges deliver education and the way that fundraising managers select and engage with potential donors. Despite these advances, the empirical study of higher education fundraising in general is not well developed (Drezner, 2011; Shaker & Nathan, 2017; Strickland, 2009), and there is even less information available related to fundraising from online students and graduates. Given this lack of information on online students, this study explored the perceptions of fundraising managers on how online students are impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns.

Review of Methodological Issues

The review of literatures showed various methodologies have been used to explore the profession of philanthropy. Statistical analysis of data on donor motivations or giving habits were common. Researchers used survey data and/or institutional giving records to review factors that influenced giving behaviors such as alumni status, (Borden, Shaker, & Kienker, 2014) emotional attachment to the institution, (Nash & Vaccarino, 2016) and a history of past giving (Lindahl & Winship, 1992). Other studies explored the relationship between engagement with the institution and philanthropic behaviors (Bernal & Mille, 2014; Miller, 2013; Watsyn, 2009; Weerts & Cabrera, 2017). Case studies are used frequently in higher education fundraising research to evaluate different characteristics of both donor groups, and fundraising professionals (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2009).

Fundraising, tuition, and grants are the primary revenue streams that educational institutions use to fund operations (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Speck, 2010). Fundraising revenue can be further divided into donations that come from different sources, such as corporate gifts, employee contributions, and gifts from alumni. Although each of these separate giving populations has been impacted by technology and the changing culture of philanthropy in the United States, this study will focus primarily on students and alumni, with special focus on those students who are alumni of online programs. Higher education fundraising managers are a point of connection between students/alumni and the university's formal fundraising efforts, and provided feedback on the giving behaviors of online alumni.

Case study design was appropriate for answering questions about the impact of online education on collegiate fundraising. Yin (2003) noted, case studies are well suited to studying complex social phenomena. Philanthropy definitely qualifies as a complex social phenomenon. Furthermore, case studies are appropriate for situations when the researcher has little control over the research subjects, but wants to understand the real-life impacts their behavior has on a situation (Yin, 2003). Using the tools of qualitative research: observations, interviews, and evaluation of documents, (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) this study explored how fundraising managers perceived online education's impact on their work. The researcher developed what Yin (2003) called a descriptive case study to explore the perceptions of fundraising managers rather than a design intended to find causal factors for those perceptions.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Although giving has always been part of the educational enterprise, the empirical study of U.S. philanthropy in higher education has not been exhaustively investigated (Strickland, 2009). Drezner (2011) noted, "The need for more research on philanthropic giving patterns is apparent" (p. 2). Finding a coherent and consistent fundraising strategy or body of knowledge employed by fundraising managers and development offices across the spectrum of higher education institutions was difficult, particularly when pertaining to online students.

Much of the difficulty in finding empirical information on educational philanthropy was related to philanthropy's status as a profession. Scholars are still divided on fundamental questions such as whether fundraising is a mature profession (Boland, 2002) or a profession that still needs to formalize and develop (Aldrich, 2016). Shaker and Nathan (2017), argued large amounts of the information on fundraising has focused on the personal attributes of fundraising professionals, while information on the knowledge-base and learnable skills necessary for fundraising success has lagged. Breeze (2017) and Proper and Caboni (2014) argued that most of the scholarly activity on fundraising is devoted to the actions, behaviors, and motivations of donors instead of at fundraising fundamentals. Mack, Kelly, and Wilson (2016), argued that fundraising does not have a singular academic home and is spread across public relations, marketing, nonprofit management, and higher education administration, resulting in a disjointed approach to scholarship and training in the profession. Additionally, Breeze (2017) claimed that much research on philanthropy is *donor-centric* which does not address the fundamental functions played by fundraising professionals in the process of soliciting gifts.

Upon encountering these debates about the fundamental attributes of the fundraising profession, it became apparent to the researcher that the body of knowledge on fundraising in general was still emerging. Information on educational fundraising was a smaller and less explored subsection of philanthropy overall. Finally, empirical study of the impacts of graduates of online programs (yet another, smaller sub-group) was virtually nonexistent. There was an increasing amount of literature on each of these sub-groups, mostly from professional organizations and expert commentary, but peer-reviewed literature was scarce. Whillans (2016) acknowledged that although there had been an uptick in research on philanthropic giving in recent years, there was still a large disconnect between scholars and practitioners in the field. Upon identifying this gap in the literature, the researcher developed a series of research questions to explore the impact that online education was having on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. The research questions focused on the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers. The researcher wanted to explore how fundraising managers perceived the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns.

Critique of Previous Research

Previous research on higher education and philanthropy has largely focused on residential, undergraduate programs. Additionally, much of the research has been in the form of case studies and largely aimed at a small number of schools (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2009; Moore, 2014). Generalizable results in educational fundraising practices are not as established as giving behaviors in other fields of philanthropy. As the body of knowledge on giving patterns in higher education develops and institutional norms take effect, it was necessary to consider the growing number of online students and learn more about how fundraising managers perceive the impact of online education on their giving behaviors and preferences.

Chapter 2 Summary

The literatures reviewed in this chapter explored educational fundraising, technological changes to education and fundraising practice, and academic research into fundraising principles. This review identified gaps in the general knowledge bases of fundraising in general, higher education fundraising, and particularly in information related to higher education fundraising from graduates of online programs. Given the projected increases in online education over the next five to ten years (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), the researcher was interested in learning more about how online students were impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. The review of literatures provided little empirical information on the influence of online students and alumni on higher education fundraising. The identification of this research gap led to the development of the study's research problem and research questions.

The researcher chose Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1987, 2013) as a theoretical framework for the study, and provided an overview of the theory. Chapter 2 explored the historical foundations of higher education fundraising to ground the study in an historical perspective. Following the discussion of the history of fundraising, the researcher explored literature on the fundamentals of fundraising, and continued to note minimal information on the impact of online students.

Through the lens of Maslow's theory, the researcher studied the literature on donor motivations. The researcher noted many factors, including the importance of engagement and belongingness to the institution (Miller, 2013), as predictors of giving. The various factors associated with philanthropic tendencies were frequently associated with the upper (fourth and fifth) levels of Maslow's hierarchy, and were generally associated with graduates of on-ground undergraduate academic programs. Information on the donor motivations of online students was minimal.

Based on this review of literatures, the researcher observed a need for greater understanding of how graduates of online programs were impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. Given philanthropy's historically important role in helping to fund operations at colleges and universities (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Speck, 2010), and the uncertainty of how graduates of online programs will engage with their institutions while enrolled and beyond, there was a strong argument for this research project. Chapter 3 continued this exploration and described the research population and methods used by the researcher in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Higher education enrollments are increasingly moving online. As more students study asynchronously and apart from the brick and mortar of traditional higher education institutions, the academic offerings of colleges and universities are rapidly changing. The increase in online students is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, with upwards of 5 million students projected to be enrolled online by 2020 (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016).

In addition to the numerous pedagogical changes brought on by online education, there are significant changes occurring in higher education business practices, including fundraising operations. Philanthropy's role in U.S. higher education is longstanding, beginning with the gift that established the country's first postsecondary institution, Harvard, in 1636 (Curti & Nash, 1965). In the nearly four hundred years since Harvard was founded, the higher education fundraising machine has grown more sophisticated and massive, with virtually every school in the U.S. employing someone in their development or institutional advancement offices, and some schools employing large professional fundraising staffs (Worth & Asp, 1994).

As colleges and universities face changes in their student bodies and decreases in traditional funding sources, such as state and federal aid, the role of educational philanthropy gains importance. Current studies on educational philanthropy are mostly geared towards residential, undergraduate college students, a population that is generally declining (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016). However, as previously noted by Clinefelter and Aslanian (2016), the population of students taking some or all of their education at a distance is increasing. The importance of educational philanthropy grows, and the number of online students in higher education also grows. There was a need to study the convergence of these two trends in higher education, and determine how fundraising managers perceived their impact on fundraising practices and giving patterns.

This qualitative case study explored how fundraising managers perceived the impact of online students on educational philanthropy. Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for answering questions related online students and giving behaviors because it allowed the researcher to interact with the subjects (in this case, fundraising managers) and involved them in the data collection (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This descriptive case study explored the perceptions of fundraising managers rather than strictly looking for a causal factor to explain giving behaviors. This case study design allowed the fundraising managers, who are *out in the trenches,* to share their perceptions on the giving behaviors of online students. The study questions explored the perceptions of the fundraising managers, related to the donor behaviors and engagement strategies that fundraisers employ with online students. Qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because changing student demographics and fundraising behaviors are contemporary questions (Yin, 2003), and the perceptions of fundraising managers shed light on how giving behaviors are changing in the 21st century. The researcher chose to bound this case study by using a coalition of private, nonprofit institutions in the western United States that offered both online and on-ground academic programs as the research population.

This study was significant because higher education institutions depend on donations to help fund operations (Barr & McClellan, 2010; Speck, 2010). As the demographics of colleges and universities change, fundraising managers may need to employ different engagement tools or fundraising strategies. There are many factors that impact giving behaviors, such as alumni status, (Borden, Shaker, & Kienker, 2014) emotional attachment to the institution, (Nash &

Vaccarino, 2016) and a history of past giving (Lindahl & Winship, 1992). None of these studies, however, specifically considered whether these donor motivations are true for online students. The researcher did not find sufficient empirical evidence available on online student giving behaviors to guide the decisions of fundraising managers. This study explored knowledge on educational philanthropy in the age of online learning, and provided information on the perceptions and practices of today's fundraising professionals.

Research Questions (RQ):

RQ1. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns?

RQ1a. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices?

RQ1b. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising giving patterns?

RQ1c. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on the relationship between alumni and the school?

RQ 2. What challenges and/or opportunities to fundraising do fundraising managers report as a result of the new cohort of online students?

RQ 3. What strategies are fundraising managers employing to engage online students before and after they graduate?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how higher education fundraising managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns within a narrowly-focused group of private colleges and universities in the western United States. The literature review in chapter 2 discussed the history of philanthropy in American education and noted that the demographics in higher education are shifting to include more online students (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016). The literature review exposed a gap in the understanding of how this increase in online students impacts educational philanthropy. The literature review noted that the profession of fundraising also faced disruption by online technology. Case study design was an appropriate methodology to explore the perceptions of fundraising managers related to these changes.

Case studies "are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). In this study, the central research questions related to *how* the daily practices and the perceptions of education fundraisers were impacted by online education. In this context, case study design was appropriate for gathering baseline information to inform fundraising managers and suggest new lines of inquiry for future research.

In addition to the lack of information on the giving habits of online alumni, there was a lack of information on how colleges and universities were engaging with online students while they were in school. Engagement was shown to be an important factor in cultivating giving behaviors (Bernal & Mille, 2014; Miller, 2013; Watsyn, 2009; Weerts & Cabrera, 2017), and online students may not have the same opportunities for engaging with their classmates or institution as their on-ground student counterparts. Current studies on the engagement of online students were typically concerned with academic engagement, while engagement as it relates to philanthropy lacked substantial evidence. When viewed through the theoretical framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, engagement coincided with *higher order needs* in the hierarchy (Maslow, 2013). If engagement was a key factor in institutional loyalty and a predictor of giving behaviors, then understanding how fundraising managers worked to engage current students, or *future donors,* was significant and important information to inform philanthropic practice.

Case study design involving multiple subjects was useful for determining if the information collected by the researcher could inform the practices of other fundraising managers at similar schools. Case studies also allow the researcher to collect data from multiple sources and then stitch the various bits of information together to create a rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study analyzed information derived from interviews of fundraising managers at private, nonprofit higher education institutions in the western United States to determine their perceptions of the giving behaviors of online students compared to their on-ground counterparts. The responses and perceptions of each of the fundraising managers were coded to identify patterns or trends. Saldaña (2009) defined codes as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The coded responses of the fundraising managers allowed patterns to emerge related to how they perceived the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. This information may prove useful to philanthropic researchers and practitioners alike. More information about coding and themes is contained in the Data Analysis Procedures section and also in Chapter 4.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Creswell's (2003) discussion of sampling methods, noted qualitative research, "does not necessarily suggest random sampling or selection of a large number of participants and sites as typically found in *quantitative* research" (p. 185). Instead, qualitative researchers *purposefully* select the participants and other data points in their study after thoughtful consideration and research into what subjects/information "will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2003, p. 185). Consequently, this study employed a purposeful sample of a very narrow and specific population: higher education fundraising managers from private colleges and universities in the western United States with both online and on-ground academic programs.

This case study explored the perceptions of fundraising managers at private, nonprofit higher education institutions on how higher education is changing as a result of online programming. It is important to note that there is no single formula for how fundraising was handled at a given college or university (Heaton, 2014). At some institutions, fundraising is the sole domain of the university president, while others employ a cabinet-level fundraising director or a chief development officer (Worth & Asp, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the term *fundraising manager* describes the person at the college or university with primary responsibility for fundraising activities at the institution, regardless of official job title. In this case, job title was less important than the interactions that the fundraising manager has with the alumni and students at their institution.

Research Population. Geography and institutional affiliation contributed to setting the boundaries for this case study. Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that case study researchers often struggle with topics that are too broad or have too many attributes to study. In the interest of keeping the study parameters manageable, the author chose to focus the study on higher education fundraising managers at private, not for profit colleges and universities in the western United States. The researcher chose to use membership in a coalition of private postsecondary institutions in the western United States to set boundaries for study participants. To protect the anonymity of the participating colleges and universities, a pseudonym, *the Coalition*, was used to describe the organization of postsecondary institutions. Each Coalition school was numbered and the fundraising managers at each school were given a pseudonym (e.g. "Jane" from *Coalition School 1*) to protect individual participant identity.

This research study was bound by the geography of the western United States, and the common context that the participating institutions shared: their membership in the Coalition. The Coalition's membership comprised approximately 25 private colleges and universities and affiliate institutions, all of which had at least one employee serving as a fundraising manager. According to the coalition's website, the organization's mission is to advocate for public and private support of its member institutions. The Coalition member schools are a diverse group of institutions. Some of the Coalition schools are affiliated with religious denominations, while others are not. Coalition members include colleges and universities that primarily serve undergraduates, others with only graduate/professional degree programs, and specialized schools with programs in the arts, or health care.

The broad diversity of the Coalition member institutions was ideal for this case study. Choosing schools with fairly developed online programming was an important characteristic of the case study participants. If a school's online offerings were a recent addition, or only made up a small fraction of the overall student body, fundraising managers may not have provided substantive information. To intentionally target Coalition member schools with developed online and on-ground academic programs, a system for ranking the institutions was necessary. The ranking system was based on information that was readily available on each institution's website.

The two most important ranking factors were the presence of both online and on-ground programs, and the number of online programs offered at each school. Schools with online programs that were more than seven years old were ranked higher than those schools with newer online programs. Fundraising managers at institutions with more established online programs were likely to have more substantive experience with online student fundraising behaviors. The scoring system for ranking the Coalition members is shown in Table 1, and the full rankings for all members and affiliates are listed in Appendix A

Table 1

Ranking System for Choosing Study Participants

Institutional Characteristic	Point Value
Has both online and on-ground programs	1 point
1-3 online programs	1 point
4 or more online programs	2 points
Delivering online programs >7 years	1 point

Sampling method. This qualitative, descriptive case study employed a purposeful sampling method to choose the fundraising managers to interview. Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to select study participants that are rich in relevant information (Patton, 2002). In contrast to quantitative research which is typically focused on random sampling to help ensure generalizability, quantitative research is concerned with identifying research subjects who can effectively comment on the research topic in great detail (Palinkas, et al., 2013). The research population included sample schools with both online and on-ground academic programs. Gathering information about the professional experiences of college and university fundraising managers provided an accurate snapshot of how fundraising was changing as a result of online education. Choosing a research sample of colleges and universities with online and traditional educational offerings ensured that the fundraising managers could compare their perceptions of each type of student. Prior to solicitation of interview subjects, the proposed research design was presented to the Concordia University-Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval and guidance.

Target population. After ranking the Coalition institutions, five schools received the highest ranking possible. Each of the five highest ranked institutions had offered online programming for more than seven years, delivered at least four degree-programs online, and also offered on-ground academic programming. Four other institutions ranked just below the highest performers, but their online programs were either recently adopted (less than 7 years), or there was not enough information on the university's website to determine how long online programs were offered. Reviews of institutional websites showed two other Coalition organizations offered up to three online programs for less than seven years. The remaining Coalition member schools did not offer online programs at the time of the ranking. Overall, nine of the Coalition institutions met the criteria to participate in this study. The researcher randomly numbered qualifying institutions 1- 9 to deidentify the participants.

Each of the Coalition colleges and universities was evaluated based on information provided on their websites and in publicly available documents. Information from institutional websites described the academic offerings of the nine sample schools, their relative size, and the structure of their fundraising operations (i.e. development office, foundation, etc.). When available, a review of IRS 990 tax information helped categorize the school's annual revenue and expenses, and quantified the amount of fundraising dollars that were raised in the most recently reported tax year. Information from the most recent fundraising report (often called an *annual report*) provided insight into the fundraising acumen of each institution.

The following section contains information on the four Coalition schools with online and on-ground academic programs that participated in the study. A general description of each institution is provided, as well as their most recently reported profits and losses, and their most recently reported fundraising dollars (as of September 2017). A brief description of the institution's fundraising operations and organizational structure is also provided. Each of the Coalition institutions is referred to solely by its number, (e.g. Coalition School 2) throughout the study to protect the identity of the participants. The institutions that participated in the study were Coalition schools 2, 5, 8, and 9. Coalition schools 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 did not participate in the study.

Sample. This section describes the four participating Coalition schools that satisfied criteria for inclusion in the study. All tax information was retrieved from Guidestar.org and other financial information was collected from each school's website or other publicly available sources. Citations were omitted from this section to maintain confidentiality of the participating institutions.

Coalition school 2. Coalition School 2 (CS2) is a Christian college. CS2 has almost 1,200 students, 40% of which are traditional undergraduates and 60% are online students. CS2 offered a variety of undergraduate, graduate, and adult degree programs in subjects that are traditionally taught at liberal arts colleges. Information about the institution's financial and fundraising activities for 2015 were described in an annual president's report, and the institution's IRS Form 990 was published on Guidestar.org.

The most recent IRS Form 990 showed that CS2 had approximately $21.6 million in total revenue and $21.7 million in expenses for a net loss of around $100,000. CS2 reported just under $1.7 million in fundraising in 2014, primarily from non-government grants, and gifts. The most recent president's report reported a modest increase in the overall university endowment year over year, and noted that the university held just under $32 million in total assets.

The web presence of CS2's fundraising development operations was minimal compared to the other institutions studied. CS2 did not have a dedicated fundraising page that describes the functions of the office. The president's office webpage did have a section on giving that allowed potential donors to make a gift online to the college's endowment, or through planned giving, trusts, and annuities. Based on information readily available on the university's website, the fundraising department appeared to consist of a single vice president and no additional dedicated fundraising employees.

Coalition school 5. CS5 is a private, nonprofit health sciences university. CS5 had just over a thousand students, with about half online and half on-ground. The college had a residential graduate program. Additionally, the university offered master's degree level online programs in health sciences disciplines.

As a not-for-profit institution, CS5 filed an IRS Form 990. According to the 2015 filing, CS5 showed almost $21 million in revenue, and slightly more than $20 million in expenses, for a balance of around $500,000. The fundraising section of the IRS 990 form showed total fundraising revenue of around $900,000, with more than $800,000 coming from government (research) grants. CS5 showed about $25,000 in fundraising from events, and almost $83,000 from all other sources, such as alumni donations.

The fundraising operations at CS5 are housed within a development office that is managed by the development officer. The donor relations page of the institution's website had a copy of the most recent annual report, information on a current scholarship drive initiative, and tools for online donation. Additionally, the website contained a *refer a student* tool, blog posts related to donor stories, a business partner's program, and a list of donor recognition.

Coalition school 8. Coalition School 8 (CS8) is a private, nonprofit liberal arts university founded in the Christian tradition. CS8 offered a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs in health and human services, education, arts and sciences, management, and law, in both online and on-ground formats. CS8's website indicated a total enrollment of more than 5400 students in 2016. Of those students, 1,400 were undergraduate, just over 4,500 were graduate, and 75% of the student body took classes online.

According to the 2015 IRS Form 990, the university collected more than $170 million in revenue against approximately $160 million in expenses for a total profit of over ten million dollars. Notably, the revenue reported in the 2015 990 was more than $40 million more than the previous year's revenue. CS8 reported more than $9 million in fundraising revenue with all of those funds coming from non-governmental donations.

The university's foundation was responsible for all fundraising and development efforts. The foundation had a large volunteer board of trustees that provides guidance and oversight to the twelve employee foundation staff. The staff reported to the chief development officer, who was a member of the president's cabinet. CS8's giving website described a variety of ways to give to the university, including some very focused campaigns for scholarships and particular initiatives. One individual professional school at CS8 had its own separate section on the giving website to specifically request donations for operations. The website had a standard *give today* button on its page, and also had a listing of different types of giving, including payroll withdrawal, estate planning, matching gifts, and membership in giving societies. This institution's giving webpages and administrative foundation structures were among the most sophisticated of the Coalition schools evaluated.

Coalition school 9. Coalition School 9 (CS9) is a small, Christian, not-for profit university that offers undergraduate, graduate, and degree completion programs in online and on-ground formats. CS9 is located in an urban western U.S. city and had a small satellite campus in an adjacent state. CS9 had less than five hundred students total, and the academic offerings at the school were a mix of religion programs and traditional liberal arts coursework.

According to the 2015 IRS Form 990, the school collected approximately $14.7 million in total revenue against more than $15 million in expenses, for a loss of more than $500,000. CS9 reported approximately of $2 million in funds raised with all of the money coming from non-governmental gifts and grants.

Coalition School 9's advancement department consisted of two directors and an executive assistant who all report to the executive vice president of advancement. The giving pages on the website contained a standard *give now* tool, a reference to a university developed app, which allows individuals to donate from their mobile device, and contact information for the advancement team. In addition, the institution's advancement page had a section that linked passages from the Bible to statements of why people give to the university. The selected Bible verses sought to emphasize the qualities of stewardship and show donors that giving to the university was a way to demonstrate their faith.

Instrumentation

The primary research tools for this descriptive case study were multiple semi-structured interviews with the fundraising managers at Coalition schools. Utilizing multiple sources of information through interviews is one of the hallmarks of case study research (Yin, 2003). This method was appropriate for exploring how online education is impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns, which has not been exhaustively investigated. Critics of the interview method suggest that the interview process, the data transcription, and analysis is too labor intensive and complicated (Carter, Bryant-Lukousius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Despite these time and effort challenges, the case study featuring interviews was appropriate because the opinions of the subjects were not well-defined (Denzin, 2006).

Collecting data from fundraising managers at multiple schools was a form of data source triangulation (Denzin, 2006). Data source triangulation through individual, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher a great deal of flexibility in eliciting information from the research subjects (Carter, et al., 2014). The researcher also reviewed publicly available information, including IRS tax records and annual reports that showed the fundraising revenues of the non-profit Coalition schools. Reviewing these fundraising financial records allowed the researcher to compare the perceptions of the fundraising managers against the actual fundraising returns for each institution.

The desired participants for this qualitative case study were the nine highest ranked Coalition institutions, based on the ranking system described in Table 1. Since it was possible that one or more of the Coalition member schools would not be willing or able to participate in the interviews, the researcher's goal was to secure a minimum of four participants for the case study interviews. If more schools were responsive to solicitations for interviews, the case study could have contained as many as nine subjects. The names of the nine target schools were randomized using Random.org's list randomizer (Random.org, n.d.). This randomized list determined the order in which subjects are invited to participate. Recruitment continued until at least four institutions agreed to participate.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The semi-structured interviews were based on 14 questions designed by the researcher to stimulate discussion on the primary Research Questions (see appendix B). The effectiveness and clarity of the interview questions was evaluated by three educational professionals using a modified version of White and Simon's (2016) Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) tool (see Appendix C). Feedback on the interview questions from the VREP refined the questions, checked for researcher bias, and ensured that the interviews adequately addressed the Research Questions.

Document review. The researcher reviewed publicly available documents to help understand the fundraising practices and returns of each institution. The sample section from earlier in this chapter contained various data points related to the Coalition schools and served as an example of the kind of information that was easily reviewed by looking at an institution's website. As themes emerged from the interviews, revisiting the Coalition school's publicly available information helped to draw further insights.

Data Collection

This section describes the sequence of events and the techniques that were utilized to collect evidence supporting the research questions. The use of multiple sources of information, (multiple interviewees, and document review) were designed to make the study conclusions more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2003). The following section describes how the researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews and reviewed documents in order to explore the research questions using multiple sources of data.

Institutional Review Board. Prior to conducting any field research, the researcher submitted a detailed proposal to the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB application was first reviewed by the researcher's dissertation chair, and then forwarded to Concordia University's IRB office. The proposal was evaluated by the IRB to ensure that the research methods are safe, and did not pose a threat to any of the participants. The IRB application included an informed consent document that all research participants had to read and voluntarily sign. Faden, Beauchamp, and King (1986) noted that informed consent has both moral and legal foundations, and that informed, voluntary participation in research is essential for ethical practice. The use of informed consent demonstrated the researcher's efforts to protect and fully inform the participants in the study of their rights. Participants were informed that they could voluntarily opt out of the research study without penalty.

Site authorization. In addition to IRB approval, the researcher worked with the research participants and the Coalition schools to satisfy site authorization requirements for each institution. The researcher informally connected with the fundraising manager (or the appropriate administrative staff) at each Coalition school to determine the process for gaining approval to do research at the institution. The researcher followed the guidelines for each participating institution and ensured that the research participants had adequate clearance prior to conducting interviews. In some cases, informal site authorization discussions began prior to IRB approval, but no data was collected from the research participants until the IRB process was fully completed.

Participant Recruitment. The researcher initiated the interview recruitment process by emailing the fundraising departments of each Coalition school and requested an interview (see Appendix F). Coalition schools that respond affirmatively to the interview request were scheduled for in-person interviews. Each identified participant was asked to sign a consent form prior to the scheduled interview date.

Interviews. The researcher conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The interview questions (Appendix B) were divided into three overarching categories related to each of the three research questions. The interview questions asked the fundraising managers at Coalition schools to describe their institution's traditional fundraising practices, and also to focus on their perceptions of how the giving behaviors of online students differ from on-ground students. The interviews contained questions about how Coalition fundraising managers were working to engage online students before and after they graduate and become alumni of an online program. Each category had multiple questions that help to address the research questions. Yin (2003) described interviews as guided conversations, and the researcher sought to create an easy, flowing dialogue with the research participants by allowing the conversation to develop naturally. The semi-structured nature of the interviews gave the researcher latitude to allow each participant to spend as much, or as little time on each topic as they would like. The researcher asked each participant the same interview questions in order to help improve the validity of the study.

Document review. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher investigated each participant's school and, when possible, each fundraising manager to be interviewed, using publicly available documents. Information from the institution's development or foundation websites helped the researcher gain insights into the workings of the fundraising department at each school and allowed for a more informed and relaxed conversation. Investigation of each research participant using the school's website and other online information helped the researcher understand the interviewees and facilitated focused, rich conversation on the research topic.

Data protection and security. Audio recording data from the interviews was stored on a digital audio recorder and then transferred to a password-protected computer for transcription purposes. The researcher sent emails of the transcribed interviews to the participants for their review. During the transcription process, the researcher removed identifiable information from the record, including the interviewee's name, their school's name and affiliation, and any other information that could be used to identify the individual or their employer, such as job titles. Identifiable information was replaced with pseudonyms (e.g. Coalition School 2 fundraising manager *Patricia*) as necessary to allow for data analysis of the anonymous institutions. After the audio recordings were transcribed, they were erased from the digital recorder and the password-protected computer.

Upon completion of the data analysis, all of the study information was transferred to a USB storage device and removed from the password-protected computer. The researcher will store the USB storage device for three years after the completion of the research project. After three years, the researcher will destroy the records of the interviews and other data collected to complete the research project.

Identification of Attributes

This study explored how the influx of online students in higher education was impacting giving behaviors by investigating the perceptions of fundraising managers. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory claimed that giving behaviors and philanthropy are only possible when a person's needs for basic safety, security, and a sense of belongingness are satisfied (1987, 2013). Students who increasingly take college courses online may not receive the engagement and sense of belonging that leads them to want to give back to their alma mater. In order to explore this phenomenon, it was necessary to identify specific attributes that the semi-structured interviews and document review will focus on. The specific attributes driving this research study were the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers in the following domains: the influence of online students on fundraising practices and giving patterns, the fundraising challenges and opportunities presented by online students, and the strategies employed to engage online students.

Online student's influence on fundraising. Widespread adoption of online education by colleges and universities is a developing phenomenon (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). As a result, the empirical evidence on how online education and fundraising impact each other is only now being investigated. The perceptions of fundraising mangers who are currently experiencing the recent influx of online alumni added to the developing body of knowledge on the subject. This qualitative case study investigated the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers, through interviews and document review, to build themes and look for consensus opinions among the sample.

Challenges and opportunities. Technological advances have impacted both education and philanthropy. Developments such as crowdfunding and data mining have given fundraisers powerful new tools to reach prospective donors (Schatz, 2017). At the same time, online education has taken many students off college campuses entirely, and it is not known whether they feel the same allegiance to their institution that alumni of on-ground programs do. This study asked fundraising managers if they were noticing these trends in their day-to-day operations, and how they interpreted the changes impacting their work. The researcher looked to identify common opportunities and challenges faced by the fundraising managers at the sample schools. Comparing and contrasting the responses from the different participants in the interviews allowed for a broader perspective than interviewing a single fundraising manager.

Engagement strategies. The researcher, after studying Maslow's (1987, 2013) preconditions for giving behaviors, was interested in exploring if fundraising managers were currently employing techniques to engage online students before and after they graduate. At this relatively early stage in the development of online education, the researcher wanted to see if there was a consistent effort on the part of fundraising managers to engage with online students before and after they graduated. It was not clear in the literature if online students and alumni were being treated differently by fundraising managers when compared to traditional, on-ground students. The literatures also did not address whether fundraising managers find the cohort of online students to be a challenging development, or a positive opportunity to solicit donations from a new population. Exploring and documenting the experiences of fundraising managers with online students, and describing their strategies for soliciting donations from them, were important attributes of this qualitative case study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview analysis and document review were designed to combine the perceptions of multiple fundraising managers and determine how the increase of online education has impacted their work. However, simply having multiple sources of information on the topic was not enough. It was also necessary for the researcher to have an analytic strategy that provides a framework for the analysis phase of the qualitative case study (Yin, 2003). Given the research questions in this study and the developing nature of online education's impact on fundraising practices, the driving framework for this qualitative case study was creating a descriptive account of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009). The researcher analyzed the answers of the interview participants and draw themes about how they perceived the impact of online education on fundraising practices. Data analysis of multiple individual interviews was a form of data source triangulation (Denzin, 2006). Documenting the perceptions and experiences of fundraising managers as they interacted with students who have graduated from online programs provided important information for the field of educational philanthropy.

Interview coding and analysis. During the interviews, an audio recording device was utilized to record the participant's comments verbatim. These audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher. Prior to analysis, the interviewee reviewed (member checked) the transcription of their interview for errors and to ensure clarity (Birt, Scott, Caver, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).

The interview transcriptions were entered into the Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis program for categorization and evaluation. The goal of the initial data analysis process was to methodically look for patterns and common themes that emerged from the interviews of the research subjects. The initial round of coding was a discovery phase, where the researcher attempted to find possible avenues for investigation from the collection of data. This early phase of coding the information was referred to as *open coding,* which was open-ended in nature (Merriam, 2009). Topics mentioned by more than one fundraising manager were considered significant in the open coding phase, and informed the next steps in the data analysis process.

In the open coding phase, the researcher developed 35 initial codes. After the phase of open coding, a second set of coding, often called *axial coding,* occurred to dive deeper into the first impression of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Topics that were shared by more than one fundraising manager were further categorized and analyzed. The axial codes were also compared and contrasted against the initial open codes, researcher observations, and documents that were selected for review to support or refute possible patterns of data.

The second round of coding combined several of the codes from the open coding phase, and left the researcher with 31 axial codes. After the axial coding process unearthed the study's five major themes across the study participants, a final stage of *selective coding* was undertaken. Selective coding allowed the researcher to develop “a core category, propositions, or hypotheses” (Merriam, 2009, p. 200). The selective coding phase of data analysis was where themes developed across all of the fundraising manager interviews. These themes were then evaluated against the research questions (see Table 3). Collective answers to the research questions and the perceptions of the fundraising managers created a picture of how higher education fundraising was impacted by increasing numbers of online students.

Analyzing documents. In this study, the codes were compared to publicly available financial information, such as the IRS 990 Tax Forms for each school and other publicly available information for analysis. The goal of the coding process was to explore how the participants collectively saw the impact of online education on higher education fundraising and student engagement. Checking the coding results against the Coalition school’s financial records allowed the researcher to explore whether the perceptions of the fundraising managers agreed with fundraising returns. The researcher made decisions about what documents to review (if any) based on the patterns and themes that emerged from analysis. Reviewing information about an institution’s fundraising dollars or practices helped confirm themes that appeared from the interviews.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Forces outside the researcher’s control limit every research design. Every research design also has delimitations, or boundaries, that are put in place by the researcher. Analysis of the potential limitations helps the researcher anticipate weaknesses in the study, and the delimiting choices a researcher makes help to narrow the research topic (Creswell, 2003). This section discusses the limitations and delimitations of this study to help the researcher consider bias and improve the credibility of the study.

Limiting factors. One of the chief limitations of case study research design is the human fallibility inherent in the effort to collect the data. The researcher's characterization of the interviews is inherently subjective. The conclusions the researcher draws from the interviews are subject to multiple interpretations. The findings in this study were not broadly generalizable because the sample size was small, and not representative of all higher education institutions. Furthermore, the information derived from the private, nonprofit Coalition schools that made up the study sample may not be relevant to public or for-profit higher education institutions. Finally, the researcher had professional relationships with some of the research participants by virtue of his position in higher education. Professional affiliations with the research subjects were helpful in soliciting volunteers to participate, but had the potential bias the analysis of data.

Qualitative research design is inherently limited by the need for a researcher to serve as the primary instrument of data collection. The method of qualitative research data collection holds the potential for researcher bias to significantly impact the findings. In order to acknowledge and avoid bias, the researcher employed techniques described by experts in the field of qualitative research design. Yin (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers must focus on developing a high-quality analysis as a foundational method for addressing potential bias. A key component of a quality analysis is an exhaustive exploration of potential interpretations of the data that is collected. Triangulating data between multiple interviews, and document review helped to reduce bias by seeking multiple sources of information to confirm the researcher's ideas (Merriam, 2009). In this case study, an exhaustive review of data from multiple sources explored how fundraising managers believe online students are impacting their work.

Delimiting factors. The delimiting factors in this research design were largely chosen to ensure that the project could be completed in a reasonable timeframe and within resource constraints. The Coalition schools were chosen because they were located within a manageable geographic distance for the researcher to conduct interviews. The researcher's employment at a school within the same geographic region allowed for easier access to the Coalition institutions and influenced their selection.

Addressing saturation. This study explored the perceptions of a very narrow and specific population: fundraising managers at private, nonprofit members of the Coalition that offer both online and on-ground degree programs. The researcher based the study on Maslow's well-established hierarchy of needs theory (2013) and used the qualitative study design theories of seminal authors such as Yin, (2003), Merriam, (2009), and Denzin (2006). As previously noted, the Coalition has approximately 25 member institutions, and nine of these member schools had both online and on-ground academic programs. Consequently, the sample of four of nine institutions in the population (44%) is large enough to allow for saturation, especially given the information power of the participating schools (Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora, 2016). The dialog in each of the interviews was strong, and the researcher derived sufficient information about each research question. Finally, the data analysis strategy was designed to look for themes emerging from the interviews with the fundraising managers rather than compare and contrast their opinions, which could be accomplished with a smaller sample.

As noted in Chapter 2, there was minimal research on the fundraising behaviors of online alumni, and it was not known how higher education fundraising managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The *information power* of the sample size is high, based on the criteria set forth by Malterud, Siersma, and

Guassora, (2016). The high information power and the consistent themes that emerged from the interviews demonstrated saturation and illustrated that the study had new knowledge to contribute to the field of higher education fundraising.

The researcher acknowledged that the limitations and delimitations of the qualitative research design contained inherent weaknesses. Those limitations and delimitations could bias the findings. Proactively recognizing potential weaknesses and bias before the research was conducted helped the researcher consider methods to ensure validity, which are discussed in the following section.

Validation

This section discusses the strategies that the researcher employed to make sure that the study's findings are valid, and that the findings are congruent with reality (Merriam, 2009). The researcher utilized multiple processes to ensure credibility and dependability. Each of the strategies used to ensure validity are described in the following sections.

Credibility. The research study's credibility, must be considered during the development, data collection, and data analysis phases of the project (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). During the research project development phase, the researcher reviewed seminal works on qualitative research by experts such as Denzin (2006), Merriam (2009), Saldaña (2009) and Yin (2003). Using strategies described by these authors, the researcher strengthened the study's credibility by utilizing multiple methods to collect data, which allowed the researcher to triangulate the various data. Semi-structured interviews of the fundraising managers at qualifying Coalition institutions, and reviews of publicly available information provided multiple sources of information on how fundraising managers perceived the impact of online students on fundraising practices and giving behaviors.

In addition to the use of multiple sources of data, the researcher utilized several strategies to ensure that the interview questions were well constructed, minimized researcher bias, and increased validity. Prior to deployment, the interview questions were provided to three higher education professionals, along with a Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (White & Simon, 2016). The Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) tool, was used to determine if the interview questions were well written and clear. For example, the VREP (see Appendix C) asked the scorer to determine if the interview questions were asked in a neutral tone, were understandable to the target population, and were sufficient to answer the research questions (White & Simon, 2016). The rubric scores and comments submitted by the three higher education professionals were used to refine the interview questions prior to meeting with the selected fundraising managers. The validity of the study was improved by the review of the VREP by the education professionals, and also by the review of the dissertation chair and committee.

As the interview data was collected, the researcher also performed what Merriam (2009) referred to as *member checks*. As noted by Birt, Scott, Campbell and Walter (2016), member checks include returning data and/or results to participants to review for accuracy. In this case, as data was collected, transcripts of the interviews and information about the emerging themes were shared with the interviewees to allow them to review the information, clarify any errors and generally approve or dispute the findings as they developed. Providing the interviewees an opportunity to review and clarify the transcripts allowed them to ensure that the researcher had accurately interpreted their perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability. Dependability is concerned with how the information from one study can be transferred or applied to another, similar situation (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001). Qualitative research is sometimes criticized for its non-transferability. However, in the case of a descriptive case study, transferability of the research findings is less important than the transferability of the research process and questions. The purposeful sample in this study was specifically chosen to allow the researcher to understand the particular sample institutions in depth, rather than attempting to find out what is true of the general population (Merriam, 2009). Specifically targeting private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States allowed the researcher to learn about the common and different perceptions of fundraising managers in a regional subset of institutions. The researcher used “rich, thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to describe the research process and findings. Thoughtful descriptions on researching the perceptions of fundraising managers offered guidance and information to future researchers tackling similar subject matter.

Expected Findings

The researcher expected to find that institutions had varying levels of understanding about how online students are impacting educational fundraising. The researcher generally suspected schools that devoted more resources to fundraising would have more sophisticated fundraising operations than schools with few resources devoted to development/advancement. The researcher suspected that some schools, with large, fundraising and/or development operations would have data and strategies for engaging with alumni of online programs. Conversely, smaller schools with more modest fundraising infrastructures would likely be less informed and have a less developed understanding of how fundraising practices and giving patterns are changing as a result of online student growth. The researcher recognized that these assumptions may have biased the study’s findings. The strategies to increase internal and external validity discussed in the previous sections were employed to minimize the bias in this qualitative case study.

The impact of online education on educational fundraising is still an emerging phenomenon, and this descriptive case study helped inform the growing body of knowledge on the subject. Studying the perceptions of fundraising managers on how online education has impacted their day-to-day work and what strategies they are employing to reach the new population of students helped inform fundraising practices and results. As online students and alumni continue to grow as a share of overall college attendees and graduates, it was necessary to understand how their presence in the marketplace is perceived by fundraising managers. Documenting these perceptions, albeit on a small scale, helped to fill a gap in the current literature pertaining to online students and fundraising practices.

Ethical Issues

This section describes the ethical considerations that were included in the design of this study. The researcher utilized the American Psychological Association's (APA) "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (2017) as a framework to ensure that the study was designed to minimize risks and maximize the benefits to the researcher, study participants, and others involved in the process. Furthermore, this research adhered to the core concepts of the Belmont Report, including: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, while following protocols for informed consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and participant sampling (Belmont Report, 1979).

Researcher's position and conflict of interest assessment. The researcher is an administrator at a private, non-profit higher education institution in the western United States. The researcher professionally knew one of the fundraising managers who was solicited to participate in the interviews. The researcher also had an educational affiliation with another of the Coalition schools. The researcher was aware that these relationships could bias the study findings or be construed as a conflict of interest. The steps described earlier in this chapter detailed how the researcher avoided these conflicts of interest.

Although the researcher was affiliated with two of the Coalition schools, the researcher did not work in fundraising or development (the researcher worked in academics and student services). This distance from the fundraising operations was an important buffer that helped to reduce the chance of maleficence by the researcher, because there was no direct professional gain for the researcher to learn more about fundraising practices at the Coalition schools. In order to minimize the chance of ethical violations, the researcher followed the APA's guidelines, which instructed researchers to "guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence" (American Psychological Association, 2017 para. 12). To the researcher's knowledge, he only had one personal or professional relationship with the development officers that comprised the study sample.

In addition, the descriptive nature of this qualitative case study helped reduce the possibility of ethical violations. Since the researcher was looking to *describe* the impact of online education on fundraising practices, and not prove or disprove a theory, there was less chance that the researcher would be motivated to analyze the data in a way that favored a specific outcome. Because of the study's design and the researcher's position outside of institutional fundraising, the researcher believed that there were no conflicts of interest in this study. The researcher diligently monitored the research process and study participants, and no unforeseen conflicts of interest arose. No additional disclosures of conflicts of interest developed during the course of the research.

Ethical issues in the study. It was important to disclose ethical issues that could have occurred during the development, data collection, and analysis of the proposed study (Creswell, 2003). In all qualitative research there is the potential for bias or human error to enter into the study because the "researcher is the primary instrument for data collection" (Merriam, 2009, p. 232). Because the researcher collected and analyzed all of the data, there was a chance that the participants of the study could have been made to feel uncomfortable during the process. It was also possible that the study participants could have felt uncomfortable disclosing information about their school's fundraising practices or returns. Fundraising managers might have been reticent to discuss their *trade secrets* or possibly felt worried that their knowledge of the subject matter could paint them in an unfavorable light. In order to counteract these concerns, the researcher pointed to the study's design, which kept the participant's information anonymous, and also allowed them to review any analysis (via member checking techniques) prior to the study being finalized. Each study participant was able to review the interview transcripts, and was able to correct any misconceptions or factual errors. These strategies of transparency and member checking, as well as the overall research design, were intended to help minimize any ethical concerns by the research participants.

In addition to the study design elements intended to minimize ethical considerations, the researcher sought and received IRB approval from the university. None of the participant schools interviewed had institutional review board requirements that necessitated an application or review process prior to interviewing the fundraising managers. The researcher ensured that all necessary prior approval processes were fulfilled before any data collection or analysis occurred. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Following the IRB and site authorization procedures for all the institutions involved helped improve the validity of the study and promoted ethical research practices.

Chapter 3 Summary

Higher education has seen a significant growth in online student enrollments in recent years (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), and their impact on educational fundraising is not yet well understood. The perceptions of higher education fundraising managers on this subject are highly relevant, but largely unexplored in the literature. Consequently, a qualitative case study focused on the perceptions of fundraising managers was an appropriate method for exploring how online students are impacting the field of educational philanthropy.

This chapter described the qualitative methodology for this descriptive case study design. The researcher explored how higher education fundraising managers perceived the impact of online students on fundraising practices and giving patterns using traditional tools of qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2009). The research methods included multiple, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Information on the research population and sample of the study were included in Chapter 3, as well as a discussion on the instrumentation proposed to answer the research questions. Chapter 3 also described the methods that were utilized to collect and analyze data in the study, the limitations and delimitations, and what steps the researcher took to ensure that the research was valid and free of ethical issues.

The impact of fundraising is significant for all institutions of higher education. The increase of students attending some or all of their college experience online has the potential to meaningfully change how higher education fundraising offices operate. Chapter 2 demonstrated that this topic has significance, and showed that the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers had not been fully explored. Chapter 3 described the methods that will be utilized to answer the research questions in a complete, ethical, and meaningful way. The following chapters will describe the findings of this descriptive case study and discuss their implications for higher education fundraising in the future.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how higher education fundraising managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns within private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States. There is limited scientific research on the profession of fundraising in general and less on the sub-specialty of higher education fundraising (Drezner, 2011; Strickland, 2009). Furthermore, there was almost no significant exploration of the giving patterns of specific subsets of educational fundraising, such as online alumni. Mack, Kelly, and Wilson, (2016) argued that fundraising has not been fully claimed by an academic discipline. Schools of public relations, marketing, nonprofit management, higher education administration, business and others teach classes in fundraising. These authors argued that the multiple disciplines conducting fundraising research have led to inconsistent results and impeded the empirical study of the profession (Mack, Kelly, & Wilson, 2016). As college student demographics and delivery models change (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), it is important to gather more information about the giving behaviors of various student groups, including online students, to assist fundraising managers in soliciting gifts.

This research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns?

RQ1a. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices?

RQ1b. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising giving patterns?

RQ1c. How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on the relationship between alumni and the school?

RQ 2. What challenges and/or opportunities to fundraising do fundraising managers report as a result of the new cohort of online students?

RQ 3. What strategies are fundraising managers employing to engage online students while they are enrolled and after they graduate?

The research questions were explored through a series of semi-structured interviews with four fundraising managers from private, nonprofit colleges and universities the western United States. Each interview consisted of fifteen questions. Prior to the interviews, the interview questions were reviewed by three educational experts using a standardized rubric (White & Simon, 2016) to ensure the questions were effective for exploring the research questions. The interviews were designed to be conversational, and the research subjects were encouraged to speak candidly. The researcher reviewed publicly available information about each interviewee's college or university to understand the size and general structure of each fundraising operation and evaluate the reported fundraising returns for the available taxable years. Each of the fundraising managers was given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts (member checking) and make corrections or clarifications prior to data analysis using strategies described by Birt, Scott, Caver, Campbell, & Walter (2016).

Interviews of multiple fundraising managers from different institutions, member checking, and reviews of pertinent financial and other documents related to each institution were utilized to achieve triangulation and improve validity. The goal was to analyze the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers on how fundraising is changing as a result of the influx of online students, and explore ways that fundraisers can engage with, and solicit donations from online students.

The theoretical framework for this study was informed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 2013; Pardee, 1990). Maslow suggested that individuals must have certain fundamental needs, such as food and shelter, met before they can engage in giving behaviors. The interviewees discussed their thoughts on how online students, who are often remote from the campus location, engage and participate with the institution from a fundraising perspective, both while enrolled and after graduation. The researcher asked the fundraising managers what they were doing to engage online students and alumni in the culture of philanthropy (if anything) to explore if the online programs were able to meet the fundamental needs that precede giving.

The researcher is an administrator at a private, nonprofit university in the western United States. The researcher does not currently hold a role in fundraising or development at his institution. However, his experience working in a small school has demonstrated the importance of fundraising and the challenges that small private schools face when soliciting funds. The researcher observed a rapid increase in online students at his institution and has an interest in engaging online students and alumni with the institution for their lifetime. Based on Merriam's (2009) guidance for choosing a method, the researcher selected a qualitative case study method for this study. The researcher's goal was to learn how the experiences of higher education fundraising managers helped to shape their perceptions on the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The researcher wanted to increase the knowledge base on the subject, and give fundraising managers some actionable suggestions on how to engage and solicit donations from students and graduates of online programs.

Open coding. In the open coding phase, the researcher entered the transcribed interviews into the Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis software. The researcher then critically read through each transcript and created initial categories of information that were interesting or potentially relevant for answering the research questions. The open coding phase led to the creation of 35 topical areas, which are called *nodes* in Nvivo's™ parlance (see appendix D). The researcher used Nvivo's™ node query function to sort the nodes and determine which categories were mentioned the most frequently in the interviews.

Axial coding. During the axial coding phase, the researcher reviewed the open codes to determine if any codes could be eliminated, combined, or revised. Some of the open codes were similar and could be combined into broader categories. The researcher combined the original list of 35 codes into an axial list of 31 codes. Consolidating the codes generated data patterns that allowed the researcher to begin to see themes emerging from the interviews. After this combination of codes, the most frequently discussed topics had shifted to more closely reflect the themes that emerged during the interviews. The axial coding phase allowed the researcher to develop a refined understanding of the perceptions of the fundraising managers and led to the development of themes in the third and final phase of coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Selective coding. After the list of topical areas had been refined and the researcher was able to see which topics and/or perceptions were shared by multiple fundraising managers, the selective coding phase began (Merriam, 2009). Selective coding allowed the researcher to consolidate the topics that emerged from the interviews into themes and a hypothesis that addressed the research questions (Merriam, 2009, Saldaña, 2009). The third phase of coding allowed the researcher to explore the fundraising managers' collective perceptions of the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. Five major themes emerged from the analysis of the fundraising manager interviews:

1. Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni.

2. Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.

3. Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial.

4. Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.

5. Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.

This chapter describes the sample fundraising managers that were recruited to participate in this narrowly focused, descriptive qualitative case study. The chapter discusses the research methodology, describes the data analysis procedures and findings, and presents the data for further analysis. The chapter concludes with a brief summary that leads into Chapter 5.

Description of the Sample

Description of the population. The sample of this narrowly focused case study, with boundaries in the western United States, included the fundraising managers from four private, nonprofit colleges and universities. All of the participating fundraising managers worked at institutions that were members of an organization dedicated to supporting private, nonprofit institutions in the western United States. To protect the anonymity of the participating colleges and universities, a pseudonym, *the Coalition*, was used to describe the organization of postsecondary institutions. Each Coalition school was numbered and the fundraising managers at each school were given a pseudonym (e.g., “Jane” from Coalition School 1) to protect individual participant identity.

The Coalition is comprised of approximately twenty-five private colleges and universities, all of which have at least one employee serving as a fundraising manager. According to the Coalition's website, its organizational mission is to advocate for public and private support of member institutions. The Coalition member schools are a diverse group of institutions. Some of the Coalition schools are affiliated with religious denominations, while others are not. Coalition members include colleges and universities that primarily serve undergraduates, others with only graduate/professional degree programs, and specialized schools with programs in the arts, or health care.

Study participants. Out of the 25 Coalition schools, nine institutions offered both online and on-ground academic programs and met the criteria for inclusion in the study (see Table 1, & Appendix A). The researcher contacted all nine institutions via email and/or phone to solicit the participation of the fundraising manager in the study. Five fundraising managers responded to the initial contact and four fundraising managers did not reply at all. Of the five respondents, the researcher successfully scheduled and conducted four interviews. The fifth fundraising manager replied to the initial contact from the researcher, but did not reply to any additional emails or phone calls to schedule an interview. Each of the participating fundraising managers was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. The following names are attributed to the fundraising managers from the participating institutions: *Patricia from* Coalition School 2 (CS2), *Kathleen* from Coalition School 5 (CS5), *Laurie* from Coalition school 8 (CS8), and *James* from Coalition School 9 (CS9).

Three of the participating fundraising managers were female and one was male. Three of the study participants were Caucasian and one was African American. None of the fundraising managers had been in their position for more than 3 years. Although each fundraising manager had experience working in development or fundraising prior to being hired in their current position, only one had prior work experience specifically in higher education fundraising. The remaining three fundraising managers previously worked at nonprofit organizations outside of higher education. Table 2 describes the gender, race, and experience of the fundraising managers that participated in the study.

Table 2

Study Participant Demographics

Fundraising Manager	*N* = 4	Percentage Breakdown
Gender		
Female	3	75%
Male	1	25%
Race		
Caucasian	3	75%
African American	1	25%
Time in Current Position		
2-3 years	1	25%
1-2 years	1	25%
Less than1 year	2	50%
Previous Higher Education Fundraising Experience		
Yes	1	25%
No	3	75%

Information Regarding Saturation. The sample size of this study consisted of four participants. Despite the small size, the researcher was able to achieve saturation based on the *information power* of the sample. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) argued that saturation can be achieved with a small sample if the certain criteria are met. The authors claimed that five items affect information power: study aim; sample specificity; use of an established theory; quality of dialogue; and analysis strategy (2016, p. 1754).

This study explored the perceptions of a very narrow and specific population: fundraising managers at private, nonprofit members of the Coalition, that offer both online and on-ground degree programs. The researcher based the study on Maslow's well-established hierarchy of needs theory (2013) and used the qualitative study design theories of seminal authors such as Yin, (2003), Merriam, (2009), and Denzin (2006). The dialog in each of the interviews was strong, and the researcher derived sufficient information about each research question. Finally, the data analysis strategy was designed to look for common themes emerging from the interviews with the fundraising managers rather than compare and contrast their opinions, which lends itself to a smaller sample.

As noted in Chapter 2, there is minimal research on the fundraising behaviors of online alumni, and it was not known how higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The *information power* of the sample size is high, based on the criteria set forth by Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora, (2016). The high information power and the consistent themes that emerged from the interviews demonstrated saturation and illustrated that the study had new knowledge to contribute to the field of higher education fundraising.

Research Methodology and Analysis

This section revisits the research methodology and describes and justifies the data analysis strategies and procedures used in this study. The researcher used qualitative descriptive case study methods to explore the research questions. Data was collected for analysis through multiple semi-structured interviews with the fundraising managers at qualifying Coalition colleges and universities and a review of pertinent publicly available documents. Utilizing multiple sources of information through interviews is one of the hallmarks of case study research (Yin, 2003). The qualitative case study method is appropriate for exploring how online education is impacting educational fundraising because the opinions of the subjects (fundraising managers) are not well-defined (Denzin, 2006).

Before the interviews were conducted, the list of semi-structured interview questions was provided to three higher education professionals, along with a Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (White & Simon, 2016). The Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) tool is a rubric utilized to determine if interview or survey questions are well written and clear. For example, the VREP (see Appendix C) asked the scorer to determine if the interview questions were asked in a neutral tone, were understandable to the target population, and were sufficient to answer the research questions (White & Simon, 2016). The researcher used the feedback and rubric scores of the three higher education professionals to refine the interview questions prior to meeting with the selected fundraising managers. All of the questions received satisfactory scores on the rubric when evaluated by the higher education professionals. The comments on the semi-structured interviews by three higher education professionals suggested that several of the questions could be improved and made more open-ended. The researcher updated the questions to reflect this and other feedback from the VREP. The validity of the study was improved by the VREP scores, the comments of the educational professionals, and also by the review of the dissertation chair and committee.

Collecting data from fundraising managers at multiple schools is a form of data source triangulation (Denzin, 2006). Data source triangulation through individual, semi-structured interviews allows the researcher a great deal of flexibility in eliciting information from the research subjects (Carter, et al., 2014). The researcher also reviewed publicly available information, including IRS tax records and annual reports that show the fundraising revenues of the non-profit Coalition schools. Document review allowed the researcher to compare the perceptions of the fundraising managers against the actual fundraising returns for each institution.

During the interviews, an audio recording device was utilized to record the participant's comments verbatim. These audio recordings were transcribed by hand by the researcher. Prior to analysis, the fundraising managers member checked each transcribed interview for errors and to ensure clarity (Birt, Scott, Caver, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). All four fundraising managers approved the transcripts with either no corrections, or very minor clarifications. Additionally, the researcher took notes during each interview to supplement the transcribed interview comments.

Case study methodological approach. The interview transcriptions were entered into the Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis program for categorization and evaluation. The initial data analysis process methodically looked for patterns and common themes that emerged from the research subjects. The initial (open coding) round identified possible avenues for investigation from the collection of data (Merriam, 2009). Nvivo™ software allowed the user to sort transcribed information into categories, called *nodes*. Each node was essentially a folder where the fundraising manager's answers to interview questions could be sorted into categories. These nodes made it possible to easily identify when multiple fundraising managers shared the same perception on a particular topic. During the open coding phase, the researcher read through each of the transcripts that had been imported into Nvivo™ and placed comments from the fundraising managers that were interesting or potentially relevant to the research questions into individual nodes. Topics mentioned by more than one fundraising manager were considered significant in the open coding phase, and informed the next step in the data analysis process.

Open coding. Because the interviews followed a semi-structured format, the researcher frequently created nodes closely related to the research and/or interview questions. For example, “Big Data Analytics” was a node that was created based on the fundraising managers’ responses to interview question number twelve, “Can you describe how your institution uses crowdfunding, social media, and/or big-data analytics to assist in fundraising?” (see interview questions in Appendix B). Some nodes did not align directly with the interview questions, but instead corresponded to comments made by the fundraising managers. The researcher initially created 23 nodes and 11 sub-nodes in the open coding phase of the data analysis (see Appendix D). The researcher used Nvivo’s™ node comparison query to determine the nodes (topical areas) that appeared the most frequently in the open coding phase of data analysis (see Figure 2). The following list contains the ten broad topical categories were mentioned the most frequently and had the highest aggregate number of coding references in the open coding phase:

1. Engagement strategies
2. General fundraising challenges
3. Engagement strategies/ gift solicitation strategies
4. Connections with the institution for online
5. Biggest challenges with increasing online students
6. Create a culture of philanthropy
7. Personalized communication
8. Social media use
9. Motivations for giving
10. How are online students factored into planning?

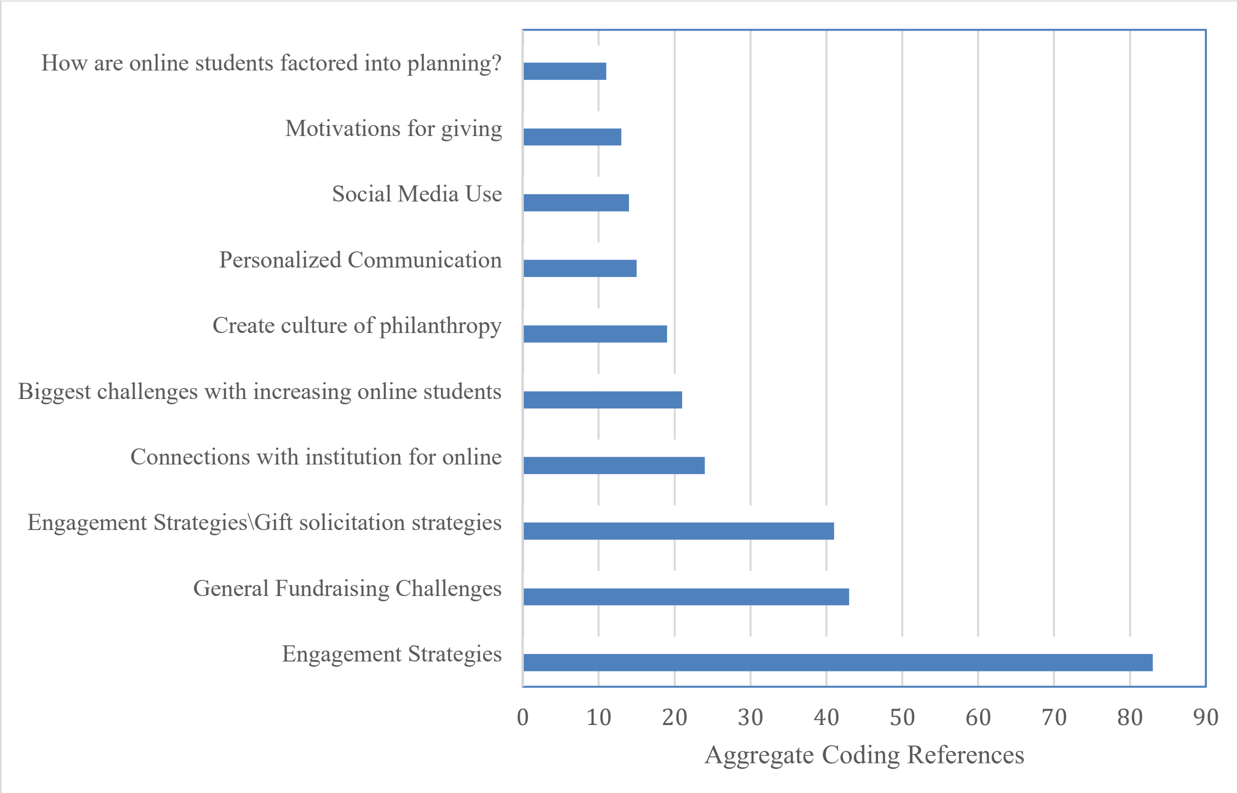

Figure 2. Ten concepts mentioned most frequently by fundraising managers in the open coding phase. These ten concepts had the highest aggregate number of coding references in the open coding phase.

These 10 categories, as the codes most frequently discussed by the fundraising managers, suggested how the researcher should frame the next phase of axial coding. The themes that emerged from the open coding round were predominantly related to research questions two and three. The first round of coding suggested that the fundraising managers all shared thoughts on engagement strategies for fundraising, and each interviewee had examples of general fundraising challenges that they were experiencing. There were less codes related to how fundraising managers perceived the influence on giving behaviors and fundraising practices (RQ1) in the open coding phase. The researcher's initial impression was the lack of codes related to RQ1 might illustrate that the fundraising managers were acting or at least beginning to consider how online students would impact giving in the future without actually having sufficient data to confirm these ideas.

Axial coding. After the initial phase of open coding, a second round of axial coding occurred to dive deeper into the first impressions of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The goal of the axial phase was to consolidate the initial list of topics generated by the interviewees, (the codes) and generate themes. These themes were used to explore answers to the research questions in the final, selective coding phase. The researcher started the axial coding phase by creating folders in Nvivo™ that corresponded with each of the research questions (RQ's). The researcher sorted the initial list of 34 open codes into the RQ folders for evaluation and creation of common themes. Codes that were not directly attributed to a stated RQ were evaluated to determine if there were emergent themes that the researcher did not consider during the study design but became apparent during the interviews.

Using the Nvivo™ software to evaluate the open coding phase, the researcher was able to identify the ten most frequently coded topics from the interviews (See figure 2). In the axial phase of coding, a review of the transcribed comments in each of these ten codes suggested that several of the most frequently coded topics were similar and could be combined into axial codes. For example, the researcher chose to combine the codes *Create a culture of philanthropy*, and *Personalized communication*, with the code *Engagement strategies.* Furthermore, the open codes for *Biggest challenges with increasing online students*, and *General fundraising challenges*, were similar enough to warrant consolidation into a larger, axial code called *Fundraising Challenges.* The researcher also collapsed the sub-code *Engagement strategies/Gift solicitation strategies* into the primary code *Engagement Strategies*, to eliminate the sub-code and create a single code. After these codes were consolidated and revised, the most frequently coded topics changed. A full list of the revised axial codes is located in Appendix E, and the new list of the ten most frequently coded topics became (in descending order):

1. Engagement strategies
2. Fundraising challenges
3. Connections with institution for online
4. Cohorts
5. Social media use
6. Technology data challenges
7. Motivations for giving
8. Timeline for soliciting donations
9. How are online students factored into planning?
10. Affinity

After the axial coding phase, the code for *Engagement strategies,* continued to have the highest aggregate number of coded references, and the code for *Fundraising challenges* moved up to become the second most referenced topic. The code for information related to *Cohorts* had the largest overall change in position after the axial coding phase. *Cohorts* was not listed in the top ten in the axial coding phase (it was tied for eleventh), and moved up to number four after the researcher broadened the codes related to engagement and fundraising challenges (see Figure 3).

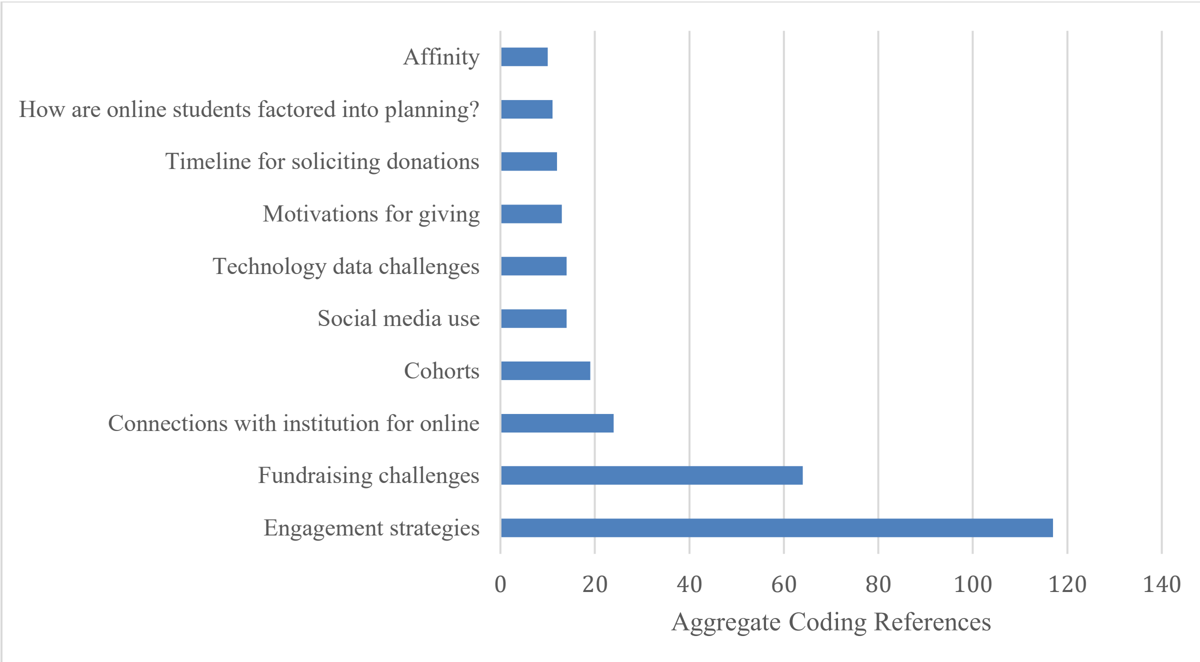

Figure 3. Ten concepts mentioned most frequently by fundraising managers in the axial coding phase. These ten concepts had the highest aggregate number of coding references after the axial phase of coding.

After the axial coding phase, the researcher observed that all of the fundraising managers had discussed in some detail their concerns about the impact of online students, and suggested methods and techniques for engaging with students and alumni, both online and on-ground. As previously noted in the axial coding phase, there were not a significant number of codes related to the fundraising managers' perceptions of different giving behaviors between online and on-ground students (RQ1b). The researcher noted that the code for *Technology data challenges* was the sixth most frequently coded topic in the axial coding phase. This suggested to the researcher to explore whether technology or record keeping challenges were preventing fundraising managers from effectively tracking online student giving patterns.

Selective coding. After the axial coding process consolidated and refined the information shared in the fundraising manager interviews, a final stage of *selective coding* was undertaken. In this phase, the researcher reviewed the lists of open and axial codes generated by Nvivo™, the transcripts, and used hand-written notes to make meaning from the disparate data collected in the interviews. The perceptions of the fundraising managers were organized into categories, and evaluated against the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009). Selective coding allowed the researcher to consolidate the topics that emerged from the interviews into themes that addressed the research questions (Merriam, 2009, Saldaña, 2009). The third phase of coding allowed the researcher to explore the fundraising managers' collective perceptions of the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns.

Emergent themes. Saldaña (2009), claimed the creation and analysis of codes allows themes to emerge from the data. After reviewing and consolidating the open codes during the axial coding phase, the researcher began selectively coding by rereading the selected interview excerpts listed in each code. The Nvivo™ software allowed the researcher to easily access the excerpts from the interview transcripts that had been coded under a particular topic. Each coded topic had its own folder, and the folder was linked to the interview transcript. The researcher opened the folders containing each code in Nvivo™ and reread the transcript from each interview. The researcher focused on evaluating the codes/topics that were mentioned most frequently by the fundraising managers after the second round of coding (see Figure 3). As the researcher read the selected excerpts from each transcript, certain concepts were mentioned multiple times by the research participants. If the researcher believed a concept was developing into a prominent theme, he would check each interview to see if the concept was echoed, refuted, or omitted by the other fundraising managers. Topics that were mentioned multiple times, and by multiple research subjects were given strong consideration as themes. The researcher created hand-written notes while reviewing the codes to summarize the findings and make sense of the information. These hand-written notes led to the development of themes. Following the methods described by Merriam (2009), the researcher substantiated, revised, and reconfigured the themes before arriving at a final list of themes shared collectively across the data.

Summary of the Findings

Saldaña (2009) noted that the analytic goal of theme creation was to winnow down the total amount of information gathered so that one or more overarching themes may emerge. The process of creating and consolidating themes allowed the researcher to find a focus for the study and make meaning from the perceptions of the fundraising managers. Document review is another tool utilized by qualitative researchers to gain insights into a specialized population (Bretschneider, Cirilli, Jones, Lynch, & Wilson 2017). Reviewing pertinent documents was a useful way for the researcher to learn about the Coalition schools prior to the interviews, and also to review the fundraising returns and overall financial viability of each of the colleges and universities studied. The three rounds of coding and document review led the researcher to themes that were collectively shared by the fundraising managers that were interviewed (see Table 3). The following section describes the themes that emerged from the in-person interviews and document review methods used to collect data in this study.

In-person interviews of fundraising managers. The researcher interviewed four fundraising managers from higher education institutions in the western United States (see Table 2). The researcher met with Kathleen, the first fundraising manager interviewed, in a conference room at the institution where she worked. The second interview was with Laurie, also in a conference room at her institution. The third interview, with James, was conducted in his office on the CS9 campus. The researcher conducted the final interview, with Patricia, in a private study room at a local library. Each of the four interviews was approximately one hour long and no significant deviations from the interview protocol occurred. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed, and the audio recordings were erased after the transcription. Each interview transcript was loaded into the Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis tool for analysis.

Using Nvivo™ and Microsoft Excel, the researcher reviewed and evaluated each of the interview transcripts to look for common themes. Five themes emerged consistently from all four fundraising managers, and provided focus for the study. Merriam (2009) suggested that the focus of the study should be based on the intended audience, the research questions, and the level of data analysis that was undertaken in the study. The audience for this study was higher education fundraising professionals, the research questions had to do with the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers, and the level of data analysis was detailed, albeit with a relatively small sample. The themes that emerged were practical concerns and emergent strategies that the fundraising managers shared about the impact of online students on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The five themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis and selected interview quotes illustrating those themes are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Emergent Themes After Selective Coding

Emergent Themes	Research Question(s)	Fundraising Manager Quotations
Theme 1. Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni	RQ1, RQ2	I think that they feel like they're not part of, you know, the organization or the institution. So, that's always…that's going to be the biggest challenge. -James, CS9 So, it's kind of like, I don't even feel like I'm an alum, so if I don't feel like I'm part of that, then why should I give? -Patricia, CS2 And so that's maybe a bit of a challenge with students of online programs…Because there isn't that history. And there's even less of a chance that they're going to get those kind of warm campus feelings that can influence how someone chooses to support the organization going forward. I don't know what to do with that, yet. -Kathleen, CS5
Theme 2. Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.	RQ1c	The graduate students, oftentimes their affinity is more towards their specific program, or even their specific cohort than to CS9 as a university. -James, CS9 Even if they were successful, and thought the program was good, and got a degree. I mean they paid for that, you know. It's kind of like a transaction. -Kathleen, CS5

(continued)

Table 3

Emergent Themes After Selective Coding (continued)

Emergent Themes	Research Question(s)	Fundraising Manager Quotations
Theme 3. Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial	RQ1b, RQ2	We haven't separated the adult online learners from the adult on-ground learners. -Patricia, CS2 We have an old [software system] that makes accessing the data difficult. So, we are in the process of engaging and implementing some new tools that will help us. But even that. It's hard to make data-driven decisions because it's hard to access the data. -James, CS9 Right now, we, as much as anyone else, have a one size fits all model. The gifts we get in, and I haven't tracked this yet, but my guess is, the gifts that we get in from those efforts are not coming from our online alums. -James CS9 I don't feel like I have enough information. And I'm not sure what benchmarks exist out there. -Kathleen, CS5
Theme 4. Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.	RQ1a, RQ3	And we are going to have to find ways to increase engagement and support of the alumni so that they feel like they are getting something in return for their gifts if they choose to give. -Kathleen, CS5 …how do you convince that person who was just going for the convenience of it that they should be a passionate advocate for your brand? And part of that passionate advocacy is giving. I think that's the single biggest challenge. -James CS9

(continued)

Table 3

Emergent Themes After Selective Coding (continued)

Emergent Themes	Research Question(s)	Fundraising Manager Quotations
Theme 5. Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3	But yeah, segmentation is… trying to get to the heart of that… I think the online alumni strategy will fall into that very heavily in the future. -Laurie, CS8 …if we're going to send a letter we'd like it to come from the dean of the college, or somebody like that. You know getting a letter from the foundation is, like, "great, thanks." But if it's somebody that you know or an email from someone you know, or somebody that you [at least know] the name. -Laurie, CS8 …it is just a bigger prospect pool. But to make use of that, the messaging, again I think, is going to have to be really targeted. -Kathleen CS5 …with the limited resources we have, how do we balance taking the scattershot approach to try and hit everyone, while at the same time targeting? -James, CS9

Note: The fundraising manager quotations are selected examples of the fundraising manager's perceptions on the identified research themes.

Document review. Private nonprofit organizations are required to submit publicly available taxable information to the Internal Revenue Service through the IRS 990 form. The IRS 990 forms report on the prior year's financial returns, so, for example, the 2016 IRS 990 documents contains data from the 2015 fiscal year. Additionally, many private colleges and universities produce an annual report on their fundraising operations. The annual reports are frequently shared with donors and made publicly available in print and/or electronic formats. The researcher focused on the four schools that were interviewed and reviewed the publicly-available information to determine if there were any indications that increased numbers of online alumni were leading to increased fundraising revenue. As Theme 3- *Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial* emerged, the researcher looked for evidence in publicly available information to support or refute this theme. The following sections detail the findings of the document review of the four Coalition schools studied.

CS2 document review. The researcher reviewed the webpage of CS2 to determine if there were any documents or annual reports posted publicly. As noted in Chapter 3, CS2 had one of the smallest development staffs of any institution studied, consisting of a single vice president. There were no documents readily available on CS2's website that were directly related to fundraising returns or the results of any fundraising strategies. The researcher was able to look at the IRS 990 forms for CS2 and observe the fundraising returns for 2013-2016. Fundraising dollars at CS2 decreased by more than half a million dollars from 2013 to 2014 and the lower fundraising revenue persisted between 2014-2015. In 2016, CS2 reported over $3 million in fundraising revenues, which was roughly a $2 million increase from 2015.

The limited information available in the IRS 990 form made it difficult to determine the exact cause of the spike in giving in 2016. According to the IRS 990 form, the amount of governmental grants CS2 received were virtually unchanged from 2015-2016, so the growth in fundraising returns in 2016 was primarily the result of nongovernment gifts and contributions. It is possible that some of the increased fundraising revenue occurred as a result of online alumni donations, but CS2 did not make any information available to confirm this theory.

CS5 document review. As previously noted in Chapter 3, CS5 employed a single development director and did not list any other fundraising staff on its website. CS5 had among the lowest fundraising revenue of any institution reviewed for this study. CS5's IRS 990 forms were available for the 2013-2015 taxable years. In 2013, the vast majority of CS5's fundraising dollars were from government grants with less than $100,000 in revenue from nongovernment gifts and contributions. In 2014 the nongovernment grants rose slightly and the governmental grants that CS5 received decreased, leading to an overall decrease in fundraising revenue. In 2015, CS5 saw the government grants continue to decrease, but saw a significant revenue increase in nongovernmental contributions, with more than $600,000 in donations received.

CS5 also produced an annual report for 2016-2017. The fundraising data in this report coincided with the fundraising returns listed in the 2015 IRS 990 report. According to the institution's annual report, of the more than $600,000 in annual fundraising, less than $50,000 was raised from alumni and friends, with more than $400,000 coming from corporate donors. Although the IRS 990 form was not available for 2016, CS5's annual report for that year was posted on its website. According to the 2016 annual report, alumni giving increased by more than $10,000 over the previous year, but corporate giving decreased, leaving the total fundraising revenue at less than $400,000, which was a marked decrease from the previous year. The lack of published IRS documentation prevented corroboration of this information.

The review of the IRS 990 forms and the CS5's annual report strongly suggested that although the institution had seen a significant increase in donations in 2015, this increase appeared to be the result of increased corporate donations and not due to more giving by online or on-ground alumni. The annual reports and the IRS 990 forms suggested that the institution is focused on slowly growing their alumni donations while also seeking consistent corporate donors. There was no information that suggested donations from online alumni played any significant role in the fundraising returns at CS5.

CS8 document review. CS8 completed IRS 990 forms, that were available through Guidestar.org from 2014-2016 and produced digitally available annual reports on fundraising for the 2009-2016 fiscal years. The researcher compared the IRS 990's and the annual reports for 2014-2016 to determine if increases in online alumni had impacted giving in any observable manner. The fundraising returns reported in the 2014-2016 annual reports were exactly consistent from the information reported in the IRS 990 reports. CS8 saw donations increase from approximately $3 million in 2013 to nearly $10 million in 2014. Donations fell by about $2 million in 2015, but were still significantly higher than in 2013. All three reported years listed all the fundraising contributions as nongovernmental gifts or grants. Neither report provided a breakdown of who the donors were, or whether they were alumni, employees, corporations, religious organizations, etc. CS8's Annual report did provide recognition lists of donors at various levels, but there was no method to determine programmatic affiliation or exact gift amount based on those lists.

CS8's IRS 990 forms did show significant increases in *program service revenue*, which in the case of a higher education nonprofit equates to tuition, from 2012- 2015. The program service revenue on the IRS 990 shows the prior year's revenue and on the 2013 form, CS8 reported revenue for around $60 million in 2012 and more than $110 million in 2013. As noted in Chapter 3, CS8 reports that 75 percent of their students are online- so the increase in tuition is the result of increased online enrollments. Given this timeframe, CS8 is likely entering into a period where a large group of online students are becoming graduates. It is possible that future annual reports may break down the donor types more specifically if more online alumni become donors, but currently the data does not directly indicate that more students or graduates of online programs are increasing overall donations.

CS9 document review. CS9 submitted IRS 990 forms for the 2014-2016 taxable years. These forms showed steadily increasing fundraising returns between 2013 and 2015. CS9 did not produce any annual report or other documents that were discovered by the researcher related to fundraising returns. In 2013, CS9 reported fundraising returns of just under $2 million, just over $2 million in 2014, and a significant increase of returns totaling more than $4 million in 2015. There were not significant changes in CS9's program service revenue (i.e. tuition) over this timeframe, so the researcher was not able to identify any major fluctuations in enrollment, online or on-ground. Of the schools studied, CS9 had the least information available regarding its fundraising returns. Turnover in the engagement department may account for this lack of information, as noted by James, CS9's fundraising manager, "We have had a lot of transition in advancement here over the last three to five years. So there has been a lack of consistency. Each VP comes in with a new set of ideas and directions and plans."

The review of documents helped the researcher to understand each institution's fundraising returns. The review of this information was most relevant to RQ1b- *how do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on giving patterns?* The relationship between the document review and RQ1b will be explored in the following section.

Presentation of the Data and Results

As a review, the researcher's three primary research questions guided this study and led to the creation of fifteen semi-structured questions answered by each fundraising manager during in-person semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data analysis of the fundraising manager interviews and review of documents led to the creation of five themes (see Table 3). An analysis of each of the themes generated by the researcher is included in Chapter 5. The following section connects the themes developed by the researcher back to the research questions and explores the perceptions of the fundraising managers on the key questions of this study.

Research question 1. *How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns?* Research question one was the only RQ with sub-questions. Consequently, more themes emerged related to RQ1 and its sub-questions than RQ2 and RQ3. The two themes that emerged as the dominant perceptions related to RQ1 where: Theme 1- *Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni,* and Theme 5- *Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.* Theme 1 appeared to be a chief concern of the fundraising managers and Theme 5 is the emerging solution to address this concern. All the participating fundraising managers perceived that it was going to be more difficult to connect with alumni of online programs, and to counteract this difficulty, they proposed using more targeted, focused appeals to online alumni rather than more traditional broad-based appeals.

Research question 1a. *How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices?* As noted previously, all the fundraising managers interviewed perceived concerns related to how online students were impacting their fundraising practices and giving patterns. Patricia from CS2 illustrated this sentiment when she commented, “People give their money differently now. So, you have to be creative, or you have to be, you know, tell some very, very appealing story to make someone give you a large amount.” The exact specifics varied slightly between institutions, but all of the fundraising managers were concerned with how to meaningfully connect with online students. Each fundraising manager was concerned that the relationships online students have with the institution are not as deep or strong as the relationships that on-ground students have with their school. Laurie from CS8 stated:

> I actually don't have a master's degree, but my loyalty would be where I got my baccalaureate degree. I just think it is kind of natural. That's where you grew up, that's where you became an adult, and you got that first degree! And so, I think a lot of cases, that's where some of those loyalties lie.

Kathleen from CS5 was concerned that the relationships online students have with her institution were more transactional and did not have enough depth or engagement to persuade online alumni to get involved or give. Kathleen stated, "You can't rely on anyone to give just because. We have to provide them with added value beyond just their degree. Because it's just something they're buying… So, they paid for it, so… why are they giving?" Each fundraising manager shared concerns related to how they would connect with online students and alumni.

The second main theme that emerged related to RQ1a was a developing strategy for how to engage and connect with online students. All of the fundraising managers perceived that targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy for online students and alumni. James, from CS9 referred to this specific appeal effort as "micro-targeting," while Patricia and Kathleen talked about personalized messages, and Laurie focused on *segmentation.* Although the terms used are slightly different, all four fundraising managers perceived it was important to try and speak to online students in a more targeted way than they did with traditional on-ground students. For example, Laurie from CS8 said the following about personalizing communications to online students:

> And then anything we do with regular, even a generic mail campaign and things like that, everything's very segmented. And we try to, you know, if we're going to send a letter

> we'd like it to come from the dean of the college, or somebody like that. You know getting a letter from the foundation is, like, "Great. Thanks." But if it's somebody that you know or an email from someone you know, or somebody that you [at least know] the name… So, reaching out to them and speaking to them in terms that make sense for them.

There was also a shared perception from the fundraising managers that affinity for online student cohort groups was particularly important. Laurie from CS8 stated, "But they're terribly connected to their cohorts too… And so, you just keep trying to get them to connect with the institution as much as they connect with that cohort."

Patricia echoed this sentiment:

> because you know, when you're in an online, or an adult community and you're in a cohort, like you build these bonds... The only people that know about that bond is probably the instructor or instructors, and those students. So, having the opportunity to share their stories would help. You know… just include them! And engage them. I think would help increase the giving.

James from CS9 also emphasized the importance of cohorts, and stated, "The graduate students, often times their affinity is more towards their specific program, or even their specific cohort than to [CS9] as a university."

Each fundraising manager interviewed was concerned with how to connect with students and alumni of online programs. The importance of targeted communication with online program alumni, down to a cohort or personal level, was a theme shared strongly across all the interview subjects. These two themes emerged as the most commonly held perceptions about how online education was influencing the fundraising practices in higher education. Other, sub-themes related to this subject will be explored in Chapter 5.

Research question 1b. *How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on giving patterns?* It became evident early in the data collection process that none of the institutions that were being investigated had a sophisticated measure for collecting data on the giving patterns of their online alumni or students. This led to the creation of Theme 3- *Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial.* Each fundraising manager described challenges that they had experienced related to data collection and analysis. Patricia from CS2 described her database was “horrible” compared to other fundraising software she had used outside of higher education. Patricia commented, “really it’s just a database. It doesn’t give you where to go, who to target, it doesn’t segment your stuff for you. Nothing. So, it’s a little challenging.”

Kathleen also expressed frustration with the database that CS5 utilizes, and noted, “we don’t have a CRM [customer relationship management, system]. Um, we’re working from Excel documents and multiple databases that house information.” Laurie from CS8 also commented on the need to replace her institution’s CRM, and noted, “what we’ve got is built for the university for things like admissions… we kind of make it work. We wrench it into place and try to make it work, but there are a lot of things that it doesn’t do.” James, at CS9 noted that his institution was in the process of adopting a CRM to replace “an old software…system that makes accessing the data difficult…”

The document review performed by the researcher was most relevant to this particular research question. The document review supported Theme 3, and showed that the fundraising managers interviewed did not have enough information to describe how online education was changing donor giving patterns. The publicly available documents from each of the institutions studied did not share any specific information related to giving from online students. CS2, CS5, and CS8 all produced annual reports on donors but none of the three listed or specifically described donors that were alumni or students in online programs. CS9 did not have an annual report, and nothing on their website described the giving that they received from online students or alumni. The review of information in the IRS 990s for each school did not conclusively demonstrate that any institution benefitted from, or broadly reported on the giving behaviors of online students.

Research question 1c. *How do higher education fundraising managers perceive the influence of online education on the relationship between alumni and the school?* The theme most associated with this research question was Theme 2- *Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.* All the fundraising managers interviewed described some way that students and alumni are less involved with the institution than traditional, on-ground students. Patricia, from CS2 said, about online students, "I think that they feel like they're not part of, you know, the organization or the institution." She also made this comment about the lack of proximity with other students due to the online format: "So, if you're not, if they're not together and they don't see each other, that's a challenge." Laurie, from CS8 said the following about online students, "We spend a lot of time considering how we are going to reach them best. It's a hard group. Because…they're not on the campus."

James, from CS9 shared a personal story about his time as an online graduate student that illustrated his concerns about the affinity of graduates of online programs to their alma mater:

> Most of the people that I graduated with, the only connection they have to the university is the MBA program. Those faculty members that they interacted with there. They may not have any connection with the school itself. They don't care how the football team is doing…it's harder from an alumni relations standpoint, and definitely from a fundraising

> perspective, to engage those people. Because their relationship with the university was so focused and narrow. It wasn't, *I spent four years living on campus. I can remember my parents dropping me off,* and *I can remember walking across the stage at graduation.*

As noted previously in the discussion of RQ1, the fundraising managers described challenges and concerns related to creating what Kathleen at CS2 described as, "warm campus feelings that can influence how someone chooses to support the organization going forward." The fundraising managers perceived that the relationship between online students and alumni have and the institution is often more transactional. The fundraising mangers noted that it is difficult to cultivate *warm campus feelings* in a population that often does not have actual, tangible, relationships with the campus community.

Research question 2. *What challenges and/or opportunities to fundraising do fundraising managers report as a result of the new cohort of online students?* As noted in Theme 1 and the sections on RQ1 and RQ1c, the fundraising managers were concerned with connecting with students and alumni from online programs. Patricia from CS2 made this comment about connecting with online students, "So I think that is always a challenge when you're online because everything is virtual. So that makes it a little bit difficult."

Additionally, as noted in the section on RQ1b, the fundraising managers were experiencing challenges related to data management and record keeping technologies such as CRMs. CS9 reported that it was adopting a new fundraising database, while Laurie at CS8 suggested that she wished they could get a new system, and CS2 and CS5 both indicated that most of their data management was done by hand in simple databases such as Microsoft Excel. The lack of sophisticated technology made it difficult to make data-driven decisions, as noted by Laurie at CS8, "it would be great if it were more data-driven, but it's pretty people-driven, quite frankly."

The fundraising managers also perceived some distinct opportunities related to the increase of online students. All four fundraising managers noted that their institutions were adding online programs and increasing the number of students, which would eventually lead to more graduates and *a bigger prospect pool*. The bigger prospect pool afforded by online education was attractive to the fundraising managers because it provided an opportunity for small, regional nonprofit institutions in the western United States to expand their reach across the country and perhaps the world. James, from CS9 made the following comment related to the opportunity of more online students:

> I think that is a big part of the opportunity. And again, it's just a whole new market that we now have- they're part of the family. And so, if we as an institution can find a way to make them feel, even though they are at a distance, and in three years or two years they've never once stepped foot on campus, and their interaction with us is minimal- if we can make them feel like part of the family, I feel like they're going to be more likely to participate.

Patricia, Laurie, and James also suggested that since many of their online students were in graduate or professional degree programs, they might have more capacity to give since they were likely to be employed. The fundraising managers agreed that most *traditional* undergraduate students do not have the ability to meaningfully contribute to fundraising campaigns until many years after they have graduated. As James noted, "the 22-year-old traditional undergraduate who is going out and getting their first job, is not a great donor prospect. They've got a great affinity for the place, but they don't have any capacity." While the fundraising managers did not view *traditional* on-ground students as a very viable donor pool, they were much more optimistic about online students, because they perceived them as a pool with more resources and capacity to give. Laurie from CS8 noted, "But the online alumni's a little different. Because often they're in a career and getting this [degree]… And so, we feel like we can reach out to them for a donation earlier than our…bachelor's degree alumni."

As previously noted, the researcher's review of publicly available documents showed no school reported an increase in giving directly from online students or alumni. None of the publicly available documents for any of the schools studied reported whether gifts came from on-ground or online alumni. Although it is possible that each school was benefitting from a bigger prospect pool containing donors with increased capacity to give, there was no way to definitively verify this perception.

Research question 3. *What strategies are fundraising managers employing to engage online students while enrolled and after they graduate?* As noted in the open and axial coding phases of data analysis, engagement was a concept that was frequently mentioned in the fundraising manager interviews. During the selective coding phase, the researcher determined that the fundraising managers were concerned with how to engage online students (Theme 1), that they had not yet fully formed strategies to address these concerns (Theme 4), and that targeted messaging had emerged as a possible solution (Theme 5), (see Table 3).

Each fundraising manager described that it is was important to create a culture of philanthropy in students during their enrollment, in the hopes that it would translate into giving habits when they became alumni. Patricia from CS2, noted:

> I think engaging them while they're students will kind of set them up for giving later. So, uh, actually I'm thinking about that for everyone. I know there are some institutions where they have some programs that actually start as soon as students are first year

students. But I kind of want to create a culture of giving. I kind of think that starts when they're enrolled.

The fundraising managers wanted to explain how giving contributes to the university, and give students an appreciation of its importance, but they recognized the difficulty of this with online students, as evidenced by this comment by Laurie at CS8:

> Making them understand that the university operates, to some extent, because of generous donors. And online, that's a little, that's a little different. You can't create that culture of philanthropy quite as easily because they're just going through and getting their degree.

Creating a culture of philanthropy as a way to increase online student engagement was a concept shared by all the fundraising managers. No consensus on how to create that culture of philanthropy emerged, however, which contributed to the development of Theme 4- *Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.* Each fundraising manager described engagement initiatives aimed at online students/alumni at their institution, which included: CS2 featured graduates of online programs as speakers during their alumni weekend festivities; CS5 invited online students and alumni to write recurring blogs on the school's website; during its giving week, CS8 live-streamed their weekly chapel session on Facebook Live to share messages of service and philanthropy; and CS9 invited online graduates to an alumni dinner the night before graduation. None of these ideas, however promising, was shared by more than one institution.

The one area that all four institutions appeared to agree on as an engagement strategy was represented in Theme 5- *Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.* This theme was previously explored in the section on RQ1a, and the fundraising managers thoughts on the subject was one of the key findings that emerged from this study. Again, there were no coherent strategies for targeting individual segments or classes that appeared across all institutions. However, all the fundraising managers agreed that engagement strategies that were micro-targeted, or narrowly focused on the cohort, or other small groups that the online students participated with while enrolled, were necessary engagement tools.

The targeting strategies varied between institutions. Patricia at CS2 thought considered asking individual online cohorts to give a *cohort gift* or to perhaps participate in a fundraising challenge to try and outraise another cohort. James, from CS9 spoke about his experience as an alumnus of an online degree program to illustrate the very narrowly-focused way that a fundraising campaign needed to be tailored to reach graduates:

> I look at [name redacted], the college of education, the program I was in. I would say most of my cohort, there were twelve of us, maybe not most, but a number of people in the cohort- they're proud they got a degree at [name redacted]. But they don't really care about [name redacted]. And if somebody reached out to them from a fundraising standpoint and said [would you give to the university?] Uhh nooo. Would you give to the school of education? [James gestures to indicate that he's unsure]. Would you give to the doctor of education program? Okay. Now we're talking. Now we're getting a little bit closer. But really, their affinity is the twelve of us, and maybe five faculty members that we interacted with the most.

The fundraising managers acknowledged the importance of importance of the small, cohort group to online students, "they're terribly connected to their cohorts" (Laurie, CS8). Several of the fundraising managers indicated that they make extra efforts to connect with online students if they attend graduation, and CS8 and CS9 described special events that they host for online students at graduation. Kathleen from CS5, emphasized the importance of gathering information from online students and donors to help micro-target future engagement efforts. Kathleen said the following about contacting her online alumni who have given, “I’m going to be reaching out to those people to ask for their perspective, and why they were inspired to give. If, and to what extent, their student experience had on their decision.” The fundraising managers interviewed shared an awareness of the importance of narrowly-focused engagement strategies.

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how education managers perceive the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns within private colleges and universities in the western United States. This chapter connected the perceptions of the research subjects in relation to the study’s research questions. The data was collected through interviews of four fundraising managers at higher education institutions in the western United States and a review of pertinent publicly available documents. Data were analyzed through three rounds of coding using Nvivo™ qualitative data analysis software and Microsoft Excel.

Five major themes related to the research questions emerged from the data collection and analysis phases:

Theme 1—Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni.

Theme 2—Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.

Theme 3—Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial.

Theme 4—Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.

Theme 5—Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.

These themes demonstrated that the higher education fundraising managers perceived they will encounter challenges connecting with graduates of online educational programs, but do not yet have the information or experience to know exactly how to meet those challenges. The fundraising managers are anticipating that online alumni will have a different affinity to their institutions than on-ground alumni, and future appeals to those students may need to be much more narrowly focused and targeted. These findings are described in greater detail in Chapter 5, and the implications for practice, policy, theory are explored along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative, descriptive case study explored the perceptions of fundraising managers at nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States on the impact of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The data for this study was collected through an examination of the literature on the subject, in-person semi-structured interviews with fundraising managers, and a review of relevant publicly available documents on the institutions in question. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to make meaning out of all this information. The researcher's data analysis led to the development of five key themes related to the initial research questions. In this chapter, these emergent themes will be summarized and discussed, sharing the researcher's conclusions, and relating those conclusions to the existing literature. This chapter also discusses the implications of the study's conclusions on practice, policy, and theory, and makes recommendations for future research on the topic.

Summary of the Results

The number of students taking some or all of their postsecondary educational coursework online is increasing (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016). The empirical study of higher education fundraising in general is not well developed (Shaker & Nathan, 2017), and there is even less information available related to fundraising from online students and graduates. The researcher of this study was interested in exploring how online education was affecting higher education fundraising.

The researcher used Maslow's (2013) hierarchy of needs theory as a theoretical model. In his theory, Maslow suggested an individual was capable of giving behaviors only after certain foundational needs, such as safety, food, satisfying social relationships, and longing for prestige were satisfied (1987). The researcher wanted to know if higher education fundraisers perceived any differences in the giving patterns between online students and on ground students. The researcher also wanted to know if the fundraising managers perceived changes in their fundraising practices, or the strategies they employed to engage online students versus on-ground students. The researcher wanted to explore whether online students were having the preconditions for giving met by their online institutions and the strategies that were employed to engage them and encourage giving.

This study is significant because higher education is changing and being disrupted by new educational models, many of which are driven by technology and distance-based delivery systems (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). Increasing numbers of students are taking some or all of their degree online (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016). At the same time that significant disruptions occur in educational delivery models and more students attend online, higher education is becoming increasingly reliant on philanthropic giving as a source of operating and capital revenue (Webb Farley, 2018; Whitchurch & Comer, 2016). There is not much information on how the convergence of these events are impacting higher education fundraising. Consequently, the researcher wanted to explore how fundraising managers at nonprofit institutions perceived the impact of online education on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns.

To explore the perceptions of the fundraising managers on the research questions, the researcher conducted in person, semi-structured interviews with four fundraising managers at private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States. Transcripts of these interviews were entered into Nvivo™ qualitative software for coding and review during the data analysis phase of the study. The researcher created a series of codes (categories) for the information derived from the interviews and refined the analysis through three iterations of coding. After the third round of coding, the researcher identified five themes that emerged from the collective perceptions of the fundraising managers interviewed. The five emergent themes were:

Theme 1—Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni.

Theme 2—Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.

Theme 3—Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial.

Theme 4—Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.

Theme 5—Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.

The collective impressions of the fundraising managers interviewed showed concern about the future of fundraising as more students take classes online. The fundraising managers' concerns stemmed from a lack of information to inform strategies to deal with graduates of online programs. The fundraising managers interviewed also expressed concern that the alumni of online programs did not have a strong affinity for their alma maters. The fundraising managers did not have fully developed strategies for asking online students for contributions, but they all agreed that highly targeted appeals and solicitation methods were likely to be more effective than broad-based appeals.

Discussion of the Results

The focus of this research study was the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers on the increase of online students at colleges and universities, and how that new population of students was impacting philanthropy. The researcher interviewed four fundraising managers from private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States to find out how they were experiencing this shift in the student body, and the resulting shift in the alumni of their respective institutions. This section provides analysis of the five themes that emerged from these interviews, and discusses the researcher's findings on each of the Research Questions (RQ).

Analysis of Theme 1. *Fundraising managers are concerned about connecting with online students and alumni.* Each of the fundraising managers interviewed expressed concerns about the challenges of changing student demographics. Laurie, from CS8 said that she was worried that, "You can't create that culture of philanthropy quite as easily because they're just going through and getting their degree. Because that's what they're supposed to be doing." Kathleen from CS5 indicated that she did not have a good sense of who online students were, or what they needed to hear to be compelled to give:

> I think from my perspective, like a shift that needs to occur with me [is] seeing the online students as actual people and not like this cloud of mysterious people 'out in the internet.' You know? I think I need to reach out and talk to these people more.

All the fundraising managers felt that they still needed to gather more information and try new strategies to connect with online students. The fundraising managers indicated that the types of broad-based mailing campaigns, or the personally-based appeals that can occur when an alumnus comes back to visit the school for a football game or homecoming were likely not going to be as effective with online graduates who were too far removed to relate to such things.

The fundraising managers recognized that they were going to have to develop more personalized messages targeted to things that were relevant to online graduates. The fundraising managers concerns were related to trying to figure out what those targeted messages were. They also shared some trepidation about how they were going to make what could amount to huge changes in their operations with limited resources. James, from CS9 illustrated this concern with this statement:

> "I know how to micro-target, but I don't necessarily know what's most important to each of those people. And so, one, it's how do you micro-target with a message that means a lot, means enough to convert them? And then two, just logistically, how microtargeted can we get? What do we have the bandwidth to do?"

This central concern about the differences between graduates of online and on-ground academic programs informed the rest of this study's themes.

Analysis of theme 2. *Affinity to the institution may be different among online students/alumni.* This theme is closely aligned with Theme 1, and underlies the concerns expressed by fundraising managers in the previous theme. Although each of the fundraising managers characterized their concerns somewhat differently, they all shared a sense that online students had a more *transactional* relationship with their institution than students who physically attended the campus. Kathleen from CS5 described her concern that students never developed the kind of "warm campus feelings that can influence how someone chooses to support the organization going forward." The fundraising managers expressed concerns that the students who only engaged with the institution virtually for the specific purpose of getting a degree did not develop the same affinity for the school that on-ground students did.

As noted in Chapter 2, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory claimed that before an individual is capable of giving, they must have certain fundamental needs such as safety, food, satisfying social relationships, and longing for prestige satisfied (1987). Theme 2 was closely aligned with Maslow's theory. Although the fundraising managers interviewed were not considering online students through the lens of the hierarchy of needs, they seemed to acknowledge the ideas he expressed. The concerns about connecting with students, and the fact that many students felt their online education was a transactional relationship that ended when the degree was conferred, were expressed by all of the fundraising managers interviewed.

Students contributed to the transactional relationship through their narrowly focused interactions with the schools. The fundraising managers acknowledged that there were fewer opportunities to engage online students and alumni in on-curricular activities than there were with on-ground students. James, from CS9 acknowledged the narrowness of the relationship online students have with their institution:

> it's harder from an alumni relations standpoint, and definitely from a fundraising perspective, to engage those people. Because their relationship with the university was so focused and narrow. It wasn't, *I spent four years living on campus. I can remember my parents dropping me off,* and *I can remember walking across the stage at graduation.*

Each of the fundraising managers suggested that they needed to find ways to make the online student experience less transactional, and narrowly focused, and more engaging as part of their strategies to develop an online alumni donor base.

Several of the fundraising managers admitted that the transactional relationship occurred because of the way the institution engaged with online students. Patricia from CS2 noted that her institution needed to overcome internal barriers that may have contributed to the transactional relationship, "I just think that people like, separate them. So, it's kind of like, I don't even feel like I'm an alum, so if I don't feel like I'm part of that, then why should I give?" Laurie from CS8 also agreed that her institution was still developing strategies to address how they collected data on, and solicited funds from online students, "…as they graduate… they just dump into a pool. And at some point, start getting asked for money. We do have to find a way to create a culture of philanthropy that makes sense to a digital audience." Because the nature of the relationship between online alumni and their institutions may be inherently more transactional, it may be important for fundraising managers to consider how to personalize fundraising appeals to the online alumnus. This concept is explored more thoroughly in Themes 4 and 5.

Analysis of theme 3. *Data on online alumni giving patterns is emerging and not substantial.* The document review performed by the researcher, and the findings from the interviews demonstrated that the participating schools did not have robust information about the giving patterns of their online alumni. All four fundraising managers expressed concerns with their databases, their customer relationship management software (or lack thereof), or both. Laurie commented that her institution's CRM "is built for the university for things like admissions… we kind of make it work. We wrench it into place and try to make it work, but there are a lot of things that it doesn't do." None of the fundraising managers had specifically broken out the amount of funds raised from online students, and they did not have enough data collected on the online population to make informed decisions or plan. The documents reviewed by the researcher did not differentiate whether donations came from online or on-ground alumni. Some of this lack of information was simply because graduates of online programs were not yet a substantial portion of the institution's overall alumni count. For example, Kathleen at CS5 indicated that her institution had received donations from a total of two alumni from online programs. As colleges and universities see larger percentages of their alumni come from online programs, the amount of data to use for planning and evaluation will grow. This may suggest that institutions would be wise to begin putting systems in place to track the giving patterns of online students ahead of time, lest the information get mixed in with *traditional* alumni and be lost.

Analysis of Theme 4. *Engagement strategies for alumni and students of online programs are still emerging.* It is not surprising that as the data about giving patterns of online alumni is still developing (Theme 3), the strategies that fundraising managers are employing to engage those students are also emerging. None of the fundraising managers interviewed were able to point to longstanding examples of successful engagement or solicitation strategies directly targeted at graduates of online programs. Each fundraising manager described some nascent efforts to reach this population that held promise, but did not have enough data to support their effectiveness over time. Patricia succinctly described this challenge when she said, "People give their money differently now. So, you have to be creative, or you have to be, you know, tell some very, very appealing story to make someone give you a large amount." Each fundraising manager provided examples of engagement strategies that were underway at their institution or had been utilized in the past to engage graduates and students in online programs (see Table 4).

Table 4

Engagement Strategies for Graduates of Online Degree Programs

Institution	Engagement Strategy for Online Graduates
Coalition School 2	Solicit gifts from online students before they graduate. Feature distinguished online alumni in alumni week activities. If possible, engage online students as student workers in the fundraising department to help them understand how philanthropy contributes to the institution.

(Continued)

Table 4

Engagement Strategies for Graduates of Online Degree Programs (continued)

Institution	Engagement Strategy for Online Graduates
Coalition School 5	Invite online alumni to attend regional alumni dinners that have traditionally been for on-ground alumni. Invite online alumni to write a recurring blog on the school's website to increase content and stories focused on online students/alumni. Segment donors based on where they live and work. Create specific, targeted messages for alumni of online programs that live regionally close to the institution and ask them to stay involved at the local level by participating in continuing education, giving, visiting campus, etc. Create scholarship funds for online students. Work diligently to make sure that correspondence from the fundraising department to online alumni is free of on-ground program-centric language, and is really targeted to online graduates.
Coalition School 8	Make an extra effort to reach out to alumni from online programs who attend graduation. Always include online alumni in all gift solicitations (e.g. the envelope in the annual alumni magazine). Use social media to share maps of the locations where CS8 receives donations. This demonstrates the school's reach. Livestreamed chapel on Facebook Live during annual giving week Created video tours with student guides to show off new construction to students/alumni at a distance. Have department chairs or deans send or at least sign emails that ask for donations.

(continued)

Table 4

Engagement Strategies for Graduates of Online Degree Programs (continued)

Institution	Engagement Strategy for Online Graduates
	Work to develop an online student experience that makes online students feel committed to the place- not just their own educational objective.
	Host a new alumni dinner the night before graduation, which is “almost like a first reunion for them… a celebration of them” by the school.
	Communicate frequently with, and steward online donors using the same techniques that are used for on-ground students.
Coalition School 9	Carefully track the effectiveness of messaging and giving campaigns with online audiences to determine effectiveness. Replicate and refine effective strategies. Discontinue strategies that do not successfully motivate giving.
	Create campaigns that get online alumni in the habit of giving \$50-\$100 a year consistently and then work to increase the size of their contributions over time.
	As much as possible given resources, target fundraising messages to the smallest target audience possible. Ideally this would be at the program or cohort level rather than just a letter from the development office.

The engagement strategies presented in Table 4 illustrate fundraising appeal methods that are specific to graduates of online programs. The fundraising managers interviewed for this study were considering a variety of methods to engage and connect with online alumni and many of these strategies are highly targeted and segmented. These targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based strategies are explored further in the analysis of Theme 5.

Analysis of theme 5. *Targeted, specific, segment or cohort-based appeals may be an effective engagement strategy.* As previously noted, finding an appealing message to engage alumni of online programs and motivate them to give was a challenge expressed by all the fundraising managers. The narrow focus that most online students bring to their program, and the tendency for the relationship with the institution to feel transactional suggested to the fundraising managers that personalized appeals might be the best way to engage online students and alumni for fundraising appeals. This personalized appeal was designed to play to the graduate's affinity, which might not be to the overall institution, but instead to a smaller, sub-population therein. James from CS9 described this phenomenon when he said, "The [online] students, often times their affinity is more towards their specific program, or even their specific cohort than to CS9 as a university. So those are all things that you have to weigh."

All of the fundraising managers noted that online students are more frequently employed than traditional on-campus students, which meant that they could be solicited for donations sooner than on-ground alumni. Patricia from CS2 advocated soliciting contributions from online students while they were in school, to take advantage of their donor potential. Laurie from CS8 indicated that she didn't think that the *cooling off* period observed before asking for a donation from on-ground students was necessary with online students. Regardless of when the solicitation period began, all the fundraising managers agreed that the messaging to online students would need to be different than that which was used to solicit from *traditional* alumni.

Laurie at CS8 described a targeted engagement effort that seemed to have been well-received by online students at her institution; the live-streaming of chapel during giving week. Laurie explained that the development department had used Facebook Live to stream CS8's weekly chapel service during the institution's giving week. The fundraising department had worked with the campus pastor and asked him to deliver a message related to giving and generosity in the sermon of this chapel service. Laurie noted that there were approximately 500 people who watched the livestream event, and that it was one of the highest trafficked Facebook posts during the giving week. Based on this initial success, CS8 was planning to repeat this livestream of chapel during its next giving week and increase the production quality of the broadcast. Laurie was quick to note that there was no way to determine if the chapel livestream had directly led to any gifts, or that it was exclusively online students who had viewed it. However, the response to the digital content was substantial, and it was a good example of a targeted digital engagement strategy to reach online students and alumni.

Kathleen at CS5 also gave an example of a targeted engagement strategy directed at alumni of one of her institution's online programs. CS5 has two large graduate programs, one on-ground, and one online. The on-ground program is well established and has a mature donor base. The online program is less than ten years' old and does not have a donor base yet. Kathleen described a targeted appeal letter that was emailed to all the alumni of the online program. Kathleen described the targeted appeal in the following quotation:

> Our first donor from an online program was made in response to an appeal letter for scholarships that was written by an [online] graduate. So, the targeted messaging did produce results, albeit small. But it's a result we hadn't had before. Um, what I would like to do going forward to further segment that is to do messaging that relates to their area of interest and speaks to the accomplishments that we've made and the support that we can offer.

The examples in this section illustrated approaches that were utilized to engage online students and solicit donations. Additional engagement strategies discussed in the interviews included: asking specific cohorts to give a cohort gift or participate in a cohort challenge, inviting online alumni and students to write a recurring blog for the university, featuring an online alumni speaker at graduation, and hosting a new alumni dinner that amounts to a first *class reunion,* for online students the night before graduation. Although many of the specific activities that each institution utilized to engage their online graduates was different, the common thread shared by all institutions was a focus on specific targeting. Segmented, focused donor appeals, that were targeted rather than global or institution-wide, were a method that all the fundraising managers were exploring to adapt to the influence of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Within the scope of this narrowly focused, descriptive case study, higher education fundraising managers at private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States perceived that the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns was still an emerging phenomenon. The study participants shared their perceptions on opportunities and challenges afforded by the increase of online students. The study participants also suggested that focused, segmented fundraising appeals were a possible strategy for engaging the growing numbers of graduates of online programs. This study added information on the perceptions of the fundraising managers related to the increase of online students in higher education, which had not been exhaustively studied.

As noted in Chapter 2, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggested that individuals are only capable of giving behaviors after their lower order physiologic, safety, and social needs have been met (1987). The fundraising managers interviewed in this study did not have strong data demonstrating that online students had satisfied the lower order needs described by Maslow, and were more likely to give back to their institutions. The participating colleges and universities were not even specifically tracking online donations in a meaningful way, so there was not enough information to determine specific motivating factors of online alumni donors. However, despite the lack of data, each of the fundraising managers expressed concerns about the transactional nature of online education, and fears that graduates of online programs would not have the same kind of motivations to give back that due to their lack of meaningful interactions with the school. This information suggests that fundraising professionals should investigate the motivations for giving in online students using Maslow and other motivational theories.

There is still debate whether fundraising is a mature profession (Boland, 2002) or a profession that still needs to formalize and develop (Aldrich, 2016). Some literature argues that the fundamental knowledge base, and essential skills needed for the entire fundraising profession need to be expanded upon (Shaker & Nathan, 2017). Breeze (2017), and Proper and Caboni (2014), argued that most of the scholarly activity on fundraising is devoted to the actions, behaviors, and motivations of donors, instead of at fundraising fundamentals. Mack, Kelly, and Wilson (2016), argued that fundraising does not have a singular academic home, and instead resided in various academic departments. The lack of a single academic home has resulted in a disjointed approach to scholarship and training in the fundraising profession. In light of the undeveloped body of knowledge on fundamentals of the fundraising profession, let alone the sub-specialty of higher education fundraising, this study made a small but meaningful contribution to the field that can inform the community of practice, the current literature, and future scholarship.

Fundraising Manager Perceptions. The opinions of the fundraising managers interviewed mirrored the discussion in the literature about fundraising in general. The fundraising managers expressed general concern about the changes in the fundraising profession and how changing donor patterns and an increase of online students would impact their work.

They also expressed concern that they did not have sufficient information to know exactly how to respond to these changes. Concerns about how technology is impacting fundraising are commonplace (Sample Ward, 2017) and the fundraising managers interviewed agreed.

In response to their concerns the fundraising manages interviewed in this study perceived that targeted, personalized messages might be an effective engagement strategy to reach alumni of online programs. Breeze (2017) noted that fundraising is influenced by the times, and responds to changing social norms, technological advances, and the financial and political realities of the day. As social media and online technologies allow for ever greater individualism and personalization, fundraising managers must find ways to create targeted, personal messages when soliciting donations. As noted by Ward, “When nonprofits are able to engage their constituents in more meaningful ways through personalization, targeted communication and content, for example, stronger relationships can be formed, leading to greater success in fundraising” (2017, p. 6). Drezner (2018), supported the idea of targeted, personalized solicitation campaigns with his theory of *philanthropic mirroring*. Philanthropic mirroring suggested that fundraisers were likely to have more success in raising funds if the solicitation strategies were segmented to address the alumni interests and identities such as gender, race, sexual identity, etc. (Drezner, 2018).

Higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns are changing, in part due to the increased number of students graduating with online degrees. The fundraising managers interviewed for this descriptive qualitative case study perceived that these changes brought challenges and opportunities. The fundraising managers interviewed also felt that the challenges and strategies to deal with changing times were still emerging, which mirrors much of the current literature on the subject. The fundraising managers also perceived that focused, personalized engagement and solicitation methods were necessary to fundraise in the current environment.

Limitations

The researcher did not encounter significant problems when the study was conducted. The goal of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomenon in question, and the results of the interviews, literature review, and evaluation of documents did not deviate from that purpose in unexpected ways. The researcher acknowledged inherent limitations with the study design, primarily associated with resources and feasibility. As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, the researcher chose to bound this study by using a coalition of private, nonprofit institutions in the western United States as the research population. By necessity of the research design, each participating institution needed to have both on-ground and online academic programming. Consequently, there were only a total of nine coalition schools that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The researcher was able to secure interviews with the fundraising managers at four of the qualifying schools. The information derived from these interviews provided valuable information on the research questions, but the small sample size limited the generalizability of the research findings. This weakness in the study design could be avoided in future studies by expanding the research population to include a larger geographic area, and including more institutions to strengthen the results of the findings.

Another limitation identified by the researcher was the inclusion of only private, nonprofit colleges and universities in the sample. Geography, personal interest, feasibility, and convenience led the researcher to choose to focus only on private nonprofit institutions. However, all types of higher education institutions are impacted by the increase of online students. Inclusion of for-profit and public colleges and universities in future studies would provide more complete information than this study's sole focus on private, nonprofits.

Finally, the researcher acknowledged that researcher bias was another possible limitation. The preexisting attitudes, opinions, and prejudices of the researcher could have impacted the results if the research design had failed to account for them. The researcher acknowledged this potential limitation in the research design and utilized several methods to remain as neutral as possible when collecting and analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. The researcher used the Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (VREP) tool (White & Simon, 2016) to evaluate the interview questions and assure that they were unbiased and effective. Additionally, the researcher utilized member checking (Birt, et al., 2016) and allowed the interview subjects to review the interview transcripts and make corrections or clarifications. These strategies reduced the potential for researcher bias and improved the study's validity. Future studies could be done by researchers with less geographical and professional relationship to the institutions being studied. This would allow for greater objectivity in the researcher.

Despite the existence of these limitations, the researcher was able to answer the research questions and draw meaningful conclusions. Although the study had a small sample size, the researcher was able to achieve saturation based on the *information power* of the sample (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora 2016). The study sought to gather the perceptions of a very narrowly-focused population, and the fundraising managers interviewed provided useful information that can benefit fundraising practice, policy, theory, and future research.

Implications of the Results

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers on the impact of online students on higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. The implications of the research findings for fundraising professionals are discussed in the following sections. This section provides practical suggestions that fundraising managers can use to inform their engagement and gift solicitation strategies with students and graduates in online degree programs. The section also evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the study and sets up the following section on recommendations for future research.

Practical implications. The results of this qualitative, descriptive case study supported the literature that shows the discipline of higher education fundraising is still emerging as a mature profession (Aldrich, 2016; Shaker & Nathan, 2017). The fundraising managers interviewed expressed concern that students who graduated from online degree programs were less invested in their alma mater and had a more transactional relationship with the institution. The interviews revealed that the fundraising managers did not have robust information about the giving patterns of online students to inform how to adapt their practices. Absent significant data to inform their decisions, the fundraising managers suggested that personalized, targeted solicitation messaging was needed to reach graduates of online programs.

Ask online students sooner. The fundraising managers interviewed showed some optimism about soliciting donations from graduates of online programs because those graduates represented a new population of potential donors unbound from geographic constraints. The fundraising managers perceived that graduates of online programs also had an increased capacity to give back sooner than *traditional* alumni. The potential increased capacity to give was based on the perceived belief that most online students, and particularly online *graduate students* were employed and were more likely to have income that could support donating back to the institution. The fundraising managers interviewed for this study believed that online students had increased capacity to give, and could be asked for donations sooner. One fundraising manager interviewed suggested asking online students to give prior to graduation to take advantage of increased giving capacity for as long as possible.

Engagement concerns. This study utilized Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory that claimed before an individual is capable of giving, they must have certain fundamental needs such as safety, food, satisfying social relationships, and longing for prestige satisfied (1987; 2013). The researcher was interested in determining if the fundraising managers perceived these needs were being met in online students, and thus laying the groundwork for philanthropic giving in the future. The concerns expressed by the fundraising managers in Themes 1 and 2 (see Table 3) suggested some of the foundational preconditions of giving were not being satisfied by the online experience. The fundraising managers perceived that students who took classes at a distance had less affinity for their school and thought of the relationship with the institution as more transactional. Kathleen from CS5 described her perception of why this occurred in the following interview excerpt:

> And so that's maybe a bit of a challenge with students of online programs…Because there isn't that history. And there's even less of a chance that they're going to get those kind of warm campus feelings that can influence how someone chooses to support the organization going forward. I don't know what to do with that, yet.

None of the fundraising managers interviewed had empirical data to support this concern about decreased engagement, it was essentially just a *gut feeling.* The need for a response to these concerns and more information led to suggestions in the following sections.

Absent quality information on the giving behaviors of online students (Theme 3, see Table 3) the fundraising managers perceived that they needed to create increased engagement with online students and graduates through specific, personalized appeals. The fundraising managers that participated in this study suggested that it was very important to create engaging, targeted messaging for very specific and segmented audiences.

Segmentation. The fundraising managers suggested targeting engagement strategies and gift solicitation messages to very segmented audiences. The segments that were suggested by the research participants were specific to the program and even the class or cohort level for online students. General fundraising appeals, from the institution or the development office, for example, were not considered to be effective with online students. The fundraising managers suggested personalized appeals from the specific program the alumnus graduated from. This may suggest that the messaging should be carefully crafted to appeal to the segmented audience, and avoid appeals that are not relevant to online students. This focus on segmentation concurs with the research of Denizen (2018), who also favored targeted appeals for higher education fundraising. Fundraising managers should thoughtfully consider how to target the messages they send to graduates of online programs.

Consider the correct messenger. In addition to choosing the right message, the results of this study suggest that fundraising managers should consider a messenger that is likely to engage the intended audience. James from CS9, commented "The [online] graduate students, oftentimes their affinity is more towards their specific program, or even their specific cohort than to CS9 as a university." In light of this insight, it may be beneficial for fundraising solicitations to be delivered by a program official or even a faculty member from the program the alumni graduated from. If engagement is the goal, colleges and universities should avoid impersonal or overly general solicitations when communicating with graduates of online programs. Finding a messenger that the alumni is likely to have knowledge of or affinity for, may be beneficial for soliciting donations.

Gather data on online giving. None of the fundraising managers interviewed specifically tracked the giving patterns of online students separately from on-ground students and none of the publicly available documents reviewed for this study differentiated between on-ground giving and online giving. The fundraising managers indicated several reasons for not collecting information specifically for online alumni, including lack of resources and insufficient database capacity. As the number of online students continues to increase (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), it is important to gather information that can inform fundraising practices. The results of this study suggested that fundraising managers should invest time and resources in gathering information on online students. Gathering information on online students will allow fundraising managers to make more informed decisions about how to ensure that this new population of students is included in the culture of giving at their alma mater.

Policy implications. The results of this study may support changes in institutional fundraising policy or procedures at higher education institutions with both online and on-ground academic programs. Given the lack of information on the giving habits of online students that each of the study participants described, higher education institutions may wish to create policies and procedures that mandate tracking of online student gifts specifically. Requiring fundraising managers to track specific fundraising outcomes and determine benchmarks is a necessary precursor to setting fundraising goals for graduates of online programs.

Additionally, the fundraising managers interviewed suggested that choosing the correct messenger was important for fundraising from online students. In light of this information, higher education institutions may wish to investigate changing the terms of their employee contracts to require some level of engagement or fundraising responsibilities for instructors, deans, and other personnel who interact with online students regularly. Building alumni engagement responsibilities into the contracts of instructors and program officials may be a way to help ensure that gift solicitations and other advancement requests come from a messenger that online students have some affinity for.

Theoretical implications. The concerns about connecting with online students expressed by the study participants were rooted in a *gut feeling* that online students were not developing affinity with their institutions. Because of this lack of connection, the fundraising managers interviewed did not know if graduates of online programs would be motivated to give back to their alma maters. This suggests that more investigation into the motivations of online students is needed. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (2013) is a useful lens for viewing this issue, but other motivational theories from business, marketing, and the social sciences may be better suited to identifying and explaining what will encourage graduates of online programs to give back.

Strengths and weaknesses of the study. This qualitative descriptive case study was narrowly focused on a specific population- private nonprofit colleges and universities in the western United States. This narrow focus was a strength of the study, because it provided a clear snapshot into the perceptions of the fundraising managers that met the study's inclusion criteria. The focused nature of the study population improved the validity of the findings for that group, and suggested that private schools in this regional area were perceiving the changes in the fundraising profession as a result of increasing numbers of online students in a similar fashion. The narrow focus of this study was also a weakness, because the population studied was so specific that it is difficult to apply the findings to other, similar populations. Additionally, the qualitative method employed relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation of the interviews and is inherently subjective and susceptible to bias. Although weaknesses were present in the design of this study, the researcher was able to achieve the research purpose and contribute information on the perceptions of higher education fundraising managers related to online students. This information can be used by fundraising managers and educational leaders as they adapt their practices to account for increasing numbers of online students. The next section makes suggestions on future research considerations which could advance the findings of this study and compensate for any inherent weaknesses.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher believes that further research into the perceptions of fundraising managers on the giving behaviors of graduates of online programs is valuable. Future research with a larger, geographically diverse sample group would help increase the transferability of this study and likely uncover other suggestions that could inform fundraising practice. Additional studies that included public and for-profit fundraising managers would give a more thorough understanding of the implications for higher education as a whole, as opposed to only private, nonprofit schools. A study that compared the perceptions of nonprofit fundraising managers against public and for-profit fundraising managers would also provide valuable information on how the industry is responding to increasing numbers of online students. Finally, a quantitative study that evaluated the giving patterns of online students versus on-ground students would be helpful for comparing the philanthropic tendencies of the two groups.

Conclusion

The purpose of this narrowly focused qualitative, descriptive case study was to explore how higher education fundraising managers perceived the influence of online education on fundraising practices and giving patterns. The findings showed that higher education fundraising managers are concerned about how to connect with graduates of online programs. Fundraising managers worry that graduates of online programs may not have the same affinity for their schools that on-ground students have, and that the relationship between online students and the institution is more transactional.

These concerns have not been empirically verified because none of the fundraising managers interviewed had sufficient data on the giving habits of online students. The researcher was unable to find data on online giving behaviors in a document review of publicly available financial reports from the study participants, or in the literature review. This lack of information indicated a need for more investigation into this subject.

Given the lack of data on the giving patterns of online alumni, it is not surprising that the fundraising managers interviewed did not have fully developed strategies for engaging with and soliciting graduates of online programs for contributions. However, the study participants all agreed that highly targeted appeals and solicitation methods were likely to be more effective than broad-based appeals. These results suggested the use of focused and segmented engagement strategies and fundraising appeals for graduates of online programs.

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Appendix A: Coalition School Ranking for Study Inclusion

Coalition Member Schools Research Study Relevance Rankings

Institution	Has both online and On-Ground Programs (1 pt).	1-3 Online Programs (1 pt.)	4 or more online programs (2 pts.)	Delivering online for >7 years (1 pt.)	Total
Coalition School 1	1		2	1	4
Coalition School 2	1		2		3
Coalition School 3	1		2		3
Coalition School 4	1		2		3
Coalition School 5	1		2	1	4
Coalition School 6	1		2	1	4
Coalition School 7	1		2	1	4
Coalition School 8	1		2	1	4
Coalition School 9*	1		2		3
Coalition School 10	1	1			2
Coalition School 11	1	1			2
Please note, Coalition schools with no online programs have been omitted to help maintain anonymity of all organizations.					

Note. The list of Coalition institutions contains both full members and affiliate members. Affiliate member institutions are denoted with a *. Schools highlighted in gray met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

Appendix B: Fundraising Manager Interview Questions

The following questions will be used as an outline for the interviews with the fundraising managers from each of the Coalition institutions. The interviews will follow a semi-structured format based on these questions. The open-ended nature of the questions will give the researcher latitude to allow the interview to develop naturally, and consequently, each interviewee may not be asked exactly the same slate of questions. Each interview question is numbered, and potential follow up sub-questions are designated with a letter. The relevant research question (R.Q.) is noted in parentheses after each interview question.

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the fundraising operations at your institution? (R.Q.1)
    a. Is fundraising people-driven, data-driven, a combination, something else?
2. Are students and alumni of online programs considered during fundraising planning? (R.Q.1)
    a. If so, how?
    b. If not, please explain?
3. Have you changed any of your fundraising practices or methods to accommodate online students? (R.Q.1a)
    a. If so, was there a noticeable trend or piece of data that demonstrated you needed to change practices to accommodate online students?
    b. Was it immediately evident that practices needed to change, or did it happen gradually?
4. Does your record keeping differentiate between on ground alumni and online alumni donations? (R.Q.1b)

    a. If so, are the giving patterns of online students different than those of their on-ground counterparts?

5. Why do you think the giving behaviors are/are not different between online and on-ground alumni? (R.Q.1b)
    a. What characteristics make these two groups similar?
    b. What characteristics make these two groups different?
6. Can you describe a particular case of an online alumni gift that was telling, or typical? (R.Q.1)
7. What do you think are the biggest opportunities that increasing numbers of online students brings to higher education fundraising? (R.Q.2)
    a. What is your office doing today to capitalize on these opportunities?
8. What do you think are the biggest challenges that increasing numbers of online students brings to higher education fundraising? (R.Q.2)
    a. How do these challenges impact your long-range fundraising planning?
9. Does your institution try to engage on-ground students in fundraising events or in the culture of fundraising before they graduate? (R.Q.3)
    a. How?
10. Does your institution try to engage online students in fundraising events or in the culture of fundraising before they graduate? (R.Q.3)
    a. How?
11. What fundraising methods is your institution using to solicit gifts/donations from online alumni? (R.Q.3)

12. Can you describe how your institution uses crowdfunding, social media, and/or big-data analytics to assist in fundraising? (R.Q.3)
13. Can you tell me your perceptions on how effective the strategies that you are employing to solicit gifts from online alumni are? (R.Q.3)
    a. Why do you answer that way? Are there metrics that you can point to supporting this opinion (number of donors, size of donations, etc.)?
14. Can you describe how you set fundraising goals for online and on-ground alumni? Is the process the same for both groups? (R.Q.3)
15. Would you be willing to tell me a story that best represents the changes happening in your field? What comes to mind that would help me understand what you face? (R.Q.1-3)

Appendix C: Interview Question Validation Rubric for Expert Panel- VREP

Modified version of the tool created by Jacquelyn White and Marilyn K. Simon

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score **1=** Not Acceptable (major modification needed) **2=** Below Expectations (some modifications needed) **3=** Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes) **4=** Exceeds Expectations (no modifications needed) **<u>Circle one for each criteria listed.</u>**	Questions NOT meeting standard and need to be revised (list page and question number). ***Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.***
Clarity		1-----2-----3-----4	
Wordiness		1-----2-----3-----4	
Negative Wording		1-----2-----3-----4	
Overlapping Responses		1-----2-----3-----4	
Balance		1-----2-----3-----4	
Use of Jargon		1-----2-----3-----4	
Appropriateness of Responses Listed		1-----2-----3-----4	
Use of Technical Language		1-----2-----3-----4	
Application to Praxis		1-----2-----3-----4	
Relationship to Problem		1-----2-----3-----4	
Comments and Suggestions			

Appendix D: Open Coding Phase: List of Most Frequently Coded Topics

Nodes (Parent Node\Sub-node)	**Aggregate number of coding references**
1. Engagement Strategies	83
2. Engagement Strategies\Gift solicitation strategies	41
3. Connections with institution for online	24
4. Biggest challenges with increasing online students	21
5. Create culture of philanthropy	19
6. Personalized Communication	15
7. General Fundraising Challenges	43
8. Social Media Use	14
9. Motivations for giving	13
10. How are online students factored into planning	11
11. Affinity	10
12. Cohorts\Affinity	10
13. Segments	10
14. Biggest opportunities with increasing online students	9
15. Cohorts	19
16. Crowdfunding use	9
17. General Fundraising Challenges\Low loyalty to institution	9
18. Different Giving Behaviors	8
19. Effectiveness of online strategies	8
20. Fundraising goal setting by student type	8
21. General Fundraising Challenges\Lack of resources	7
22. Technology_Data Challenges	14
23. Technology_Data Challenges\CRM Needs	7
24. Timeline for Soliciting Donations\Graduate	7
25. Big data analytics	6
26. Different Record Keeping	9
27. General Fundraising Challenges\Short fundraising history	5
28. Different Record Keeping\Not different record keeping	4
29. General Fundraising Challenges\Donor Fatigue	4

30. Timeline for Soliciting Donations\Undergraduate	4
31. General Fundraising Challenges\Aging Donor Base	2
32. General Fundraising Challenges\Employee turnover	2
33. Growth of online students	2
34. Typical online gift	2
35. Timeline for Soliciting Donations	12

Appendix E: Axial Coding Phase: List of Most Frequently Coded Topics

Nodes (Parent Node\Sub-node)	**Aggregate number of coding references**
1. Engagement Strategies	117
2. Fundraising Challenges	64
3. Connections with institution for online	24
4. Cohorts	19
5. Social Media Use	14
6. Technology Data Challenges	14
7. Motivations for giving	13
8. Timeline for Soliciting Donations	12
9. How are online students factored into planning	11
10. Affinity	10
11. Cohorts\Affinity	10
12. Segments	10
13. Biggest opportunities with increasing online students	9
14. Crowdfunding use	9
15. Different Record Keeping	9
16. Fundraising Challenges\Low loyalty to institution	9
17. Different Giving Behaviors	8
18. Effectiveness of online strategies	8
19. Fundraising goal setting by student type	8
20. Fundraising Challenges\Lack of resources	7
21. Technology_Data Challenges\CRM Needs	7
22. Timeline for Soliciting Donations\Graduate	7
23. Big data analytics	6
24. Fundraising Challenges\Short fundraising history	5
25. Different Record Keeping\Not different record keeping	4
26. Fundraising Challenges\Donor Fatigue	4
27. Timeline for Soliciting Donations\Undergraduate	4
28. Fundraising Challenges\Aging Donor Base	2
29. Fundraising Challenges\Employee turnover	2

30. Growth of online students	2
31. Typical online gift	2

Appendix F: Sample Interview Request Email

April 7, 2018

[Name Redacted]
[Address Redacted]

Dear [Name Redacted],

My name is Peter Szucs and I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland. My doctoral dissertation is focused on how online education is impacting higher education fundraising practices and giving patterns. My goal is to better understand how fundraising managers at colleges and universities in the western United States perceive the impact of online students on their day-to-day work. I am also interested in exploring what strategies fundraising managers are employing to engage online students, and alumni of online programs, in giving campaigns.

I am reaching out to you to ask if you would be willing to allow me to interview you at a time that is convenient to get your perceptions on these issues. My study is designed to protect the confidentiality of you and your institution, and you will not be identified in any publications. The interview itself will take approximately sixty minutes, and you will have an opportunity to review a transcript of the interview to correct for errors and clarity.

If you are interested in participating in this study, and you have permission to do so through your institution, please reply to this email affirmatively with a phone number where you can be reached. I will connect with you to discuss next steps. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Warmest regards,

Peter J. Szucs, MA
Concordia University–Portland Ed.D. Student

Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

> "Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

> "Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Digital Signature: 

Name (Typed): Peter James Szucs

Date: November 28, 2018