AIDING THE TOWN CRIER: AN ANALYSIS OF ALUMNI

BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

by

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(Under the Direction of Erik C. Ness)

ABSTRACT

Alumni boards have historically been a leading source for alumni to receive personal and professional satisfaction by giving of themselves to their alma mater. These boards have roles and responsibilities including social events, networking, and fundraising for the college or university. Many alumni boards provide a variety of benefits and services that help alumni maintain connections to their educational institution and fellow graduates. Often, alumni perception of expected roles and responsibilities are not aligned with the expected roles required by the alumni association.

Campus consolidations have become more common as institutions grapple with weakening enrollments, dwindling state support, and combining similar programs. As campuses consolidate, every aspect of campus culture must be considered. Paramount to alumni relations is the consolidation of the alumni boards and the roles and responsibilities board members are asked to play in a consolidated institution.

Research on higher education mergers, board structure, and alumni associations with interviews of alumni board members and alumni directors and analysis of relevant documents was used in this study to provide a distinctive analysis of the roles and responsibilities of an

alumni board in a public institution. Significant findings from the study highlighted the impact of institutional leadership on the alumni board, the difficulty of campus consolidations, and the importance of the recruitment and training of alumni board members as it plays a key role in board members' feelings of usefulness. Findings also showed that by combining board service with strong institutional purpose, an established training process, and communicated expectations, alumni can help institutions fulfill goals and missions.

INDEX WORDS: Alumni board, Board roles or responsibilities, Alumni director, Board members, Campus consolidation

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my family. An immense amount of gratitude for my parents Ken and Deb, for their words of encouragement and endless support during this process. To my sons John Martin and Cooper, a constant source of hugs and inspiration during the challenges of school and life. And, finally to my incredible husband, Jamie, your unwavering encouragement and support has allowed me to follow my dreams.

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INTRODUCTION

Boards in higher education often have different descriptors (e.g., advisory, foundation, alumni, trustee); however, their purpose is generally the same—to offer outside expertise and advice for the betterment of the organization. Providing this advice and expertise is the responsibility of lay boards on campuses (Schmidt, 2014). Constituent pressures, public scrutiny, and campus mergers have caused a recent increase in accountability in higher education institutions. This pressure has compelled boards to become more active and engaged in dynamic leadership (Schmidt, 2014). Price's (2018) examination of boards of trustees suggested three key avenues boards are using to become more engaged. First, they have been engaging by digging into strategic issues and altering policies. Second, they have been seeking diverse ways to communicate and create meaningful exchanges between the institutional stakeholders and those recently engaged through campus mergers. Third, boards have been looking to learn more about various topics that can inform their decision making such as the president's performance, postmerger culture, or student debt. To that end, modern boards in higher education have been evolving to become more informed, dynamic, and willing to serve as partners to colleges and universities.

Scott's (2018) research on how university boards work yielded several key elements of effective boards, including the need for members committed to long-term, mission-driven goals and being agile enough to deal with market-driven challenges. He found boards need to recognize both short- and long-term opportunities and challenges while simultaneously

encouraging entrepreneurship. Further, Scott found that board entrepreneurial success is predicated upon providing innovative resources, social networking, funding, and advocacy. A clearer understanding of nongoverning boards—specifically alumni boards—that have experienced a campus merger can provide a unique resource for leaders. Not only do alumni board members bring a historical perspective, but they also help organizations by offering institutional insight, challenging the institutions to improve, and encouraging stakeholder accountability (Pettit & Litten, 1999).

Research on boards in higher education has addressed the intersection of the nonprofit and corporate sectors. Chait (1995) noted the cross-pollination of industry and higher education began occurring because most trustees serving on boards were corporate executives. These "corporate trustees" brought real-world business practices (e.g., long-term planning, strategic planning, marketing, and total quality management) to college and university boardrooms. Although Chait's work drew parallels between corporate boards and higher education, few studies have focused on the roles and responsibilities of alumni boards on college campuses.

Hall's (1997) examination of the history of nonprofit boards in the United States followed the antecedents of modern nonprofit governance practices that date back to ancient communities, which delegated authority to small groups of elders, deacons, proprietors, counselors, directors, or trustees. Hall (1997) explained boards in higher education were originally charged with training future leaders for the country and were focused on the U.S. ideology that boards were not supposed to be controlled by the government, but rather to exist for the "good of the institution and public" (p. 6). Around the 1860s, the roles of the board began to change, and clergy began to compete with the emerging modern culture of businessmen for control (Hall, 1997). The major themes addressed in the literature during this time are still

relevant for alumni and foundation boards, including fundraising, the hiring of directors, member responsibilities, and board missions. Although the makeup of boards may have changed, uncertainties related to board values, role, and purpose remain at colleges and universities today.

Statement of Purpose

Despite the significant similarities in the authority of governing and advisory boards, the differences in their responsibilities lead to confusion for alumni boards regarding their roles (Worth, 2008). Worth (2008) suggested such confusion may be related to the board's position in the overall organizational structure, budgeting, member recruitment, level of authority, and overall responsibilities. Numerous studies have focused on the relationships that graduates develop with their alma maters (e.g., Belfield & Beney, 2000; Hanson, 2000; Okunade & Berl, 1997); however, that research has primarily focused on alumni giving. The link between alumni and their roles and responsibilities as alumni board members in a merged institution remains unexplored (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008). Thus this study aimed to illuminate an important topic that has been underrepresented in the literature to provide insight to administrators, alumni associations, and alumni directors on the perceptions of alumni board members and their roles and responsibilities while serving on an alumni board.

Research Questions

Boards in higher education are urged to become more dexterous, resourceful, and engaged in dynamic leadership (Schmidt, 2014). Maximizing and realizing the resources lay boards provide the institution is one way to understand how boards provide service to the college or university. This study aimed to illuminate lay governance in alumni boards by looking at characteristics, roles, and responsibilities. An examination of board dimensions including structure, serving (e.g., elected, appointed, self-perpetuating), staffing, scope, and size provided

insight into board roles and responsibilities for college administration, board members, and institutions. To determine the responsibilities alumni boards play on campuses, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are alumni boards, after a campus consolidation, organized relative to structure, serving, staffing, scope, and size?

2. How do alumni board members characterize their roles and responsibilities and what is central to their priorities?

3. How do alumni directors articulate their roles and the roles of alumni board members? What are alumni director priorities for alumni board members?

4. To what extent are alumni boards' organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of their board members related to broader campus priorities and resources?

This qualitative research study explored the roles and responsibilities of individuals serving on an alumni board at a merged public institution in Georgia. It is important to state that I looked at an institution that experienced a campus merger or consolidation. As Seltzer (2019) noted, although mergers are a well-tested approach to rapidly securing growth, stability, and value, careful strategic planning is necessary to consider all that could be affected such as an alumni board. Although little scholarly research exists on board transition in postsecondary institutions, looking to nonprofit and corporate literature helps to frame board structure post consolidation. As such, this study provides opportunities for institutions to better understand the differing roles of alumni serving on alumni boards and the resources and skills they bring to the table. At this stage in the research, it is necessary to define key terms.

Definitions of Terms

Alumni: A group of individuals with a bachelor's, master's, doctoral, or professional degree, from the same college or university, or more broadly, former students who studied at the same college or university (Council for Advancement and Support of Education [CASE], 2013).

Alumni association: Individuals who graduated from the institution who support the organization's goals and work to strengthen the ties between alumni, the community, and the parent organization (CASE, 2013).

Alumni board: An alumni board offers wisdom, advocacy, history, and tradition from individuals who graduated from the same institution. They are responsible for governance and committee work. Most alumni boards are part of the structure of the alumni association of the institution and work with a university representative, often a director of alumni relations or executive director of the alumni association (CASE, 2013).

Development or advancement office: College office devoted to the advancement of the institution. It is typically involved with major fundraising efforts that provide financial support for the institution (CASE, 2013).

Significance of Alumni in Higher Education

Research on the involvement and value of alumni on campuses has the potential to improve institutes of higher learning in many ways. College alumni are called upon for political advocacy, volunteerism, and charitable giving. As U.S. colleges face 21st-century challenges (e.g., being more cost effective, remaining mission driven, adhering to accreditation and regulatory standards, and identifying new sources of income), it is more important than ever to recruit, train, and engage alumni as board members and allies. The personal and professional connections of alumni are key for institutions in efforts to make connections with foundations,

legislators, public officials, and major donors. This research explored the involvement of alumni board members and their connections to outside organizations.

Additionally, alumni board members lend their experiences and expertise to help higher education leaders formulate strategic directions for their institutions (Weerts, 2007). Alumni volunteers also serve in other important ways (e.g., as mentors, recruiters, and booster club leaders) that raise their institution's regional profile. While several studies have examined the relationships between alumni and their engagement levels, institutional loyalty, and interlocks in postsecondary governance, no research has examined the roles of alumni board members in public institutions or the ways in which alumni are acclimated to serve on alumni boards.

Finally, reduced funding in higher education magnifies the need for partnerships with alumni as a primary resource for outside funding (Belfield & Beney, 2000). As university leaders place alumni on boards in the hopes of receiving philanthropic rewards, research is needed to better understand their expected role as resources for fundraising. Much research exists on alumni involvement in extracurricular activities, faculty connections, engagement, and their connection to financial contributions (e.g., Scott, 2018; Wawzenek, 2021; Worth, 2008). However, no study has directly addressed alumni board service as it relates to fundraising.

This study helped define clear roles to recruit board members with the aspects that meet the needs of institutional goals. Additionally, understanding the necessary roles can help institutions develop robust onboarding for board members. Finally, establishing the responsibilities expected of alumni board members at universities can improve our understanding of using alumni for maximization of resources.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the differing roles and responsibilities of alumni and boards. This review of extant literature provides an overview of the alumni board in higher education, including the types of alumni associations, board typologies, and processes for the scope of work the board performs. The chapter also presents research findings on the history of boards in higher education.

History and Role of Boards

Boards lead professional organizations, trade associations, corporations, educational institutions, and social communities. Their role is to govern an organization and hold it accountable to the organization (Carver & Charney, 2004). To fulfill their role, boards must be ready to prepare an organization for the future. Riesman (1958) suggested the role of a board is to protect the university of the future from past decisions. He suggested board members should not simply act as figureheads, but rather as engaged members who understand expectations and job duties. Reisman (1958) also posited the importance of identified, communication, and reinforcement work for boards. To effectively carry out its duties, a board must practice working together. This practice can be done through participating in projects, having a "playbook," and ensuring good policy governance (Carver & Charney, 2004).

Board members play various roles in enhancing college campuses (Worth, 2008). Members' duties include volunteering their time, talents, and finances to serve as ambassadors for the cause, company, or alma mater. With the increased pressure for accountability and the

increasing need for qualified board members, it is more important than ever to understand board members' roles as part of alumni boards. Research has suggested several beneficial outcomes to the institution by alumni serving on boards:

- Research on alumni providing service on boards can provide information to assist in resource allocation and institutional planning (National Center for Higher Education Management System, 2001).

- Alumni board members as research subjects can provide information to academic planners regarding what happens after graduation so that decisions on curriculum, roles, and teaching methods can be addressed (National Center for Higher Education Management System, 2001).

- Alumni boards provide assistance to campuses through giving, recruitment, and advocacy (Worth, 2008).

Alumni Engagement

The National Council of Nonprofits (2020) noted boards should steer the organization toward a sustainable future. Boards can do so by adopting sound, ethical, and legal governance and financial management policies to advance its mission. University alumni boards provide a way for alumni to stay connected to their alma mater and to support and advance the university's mission. Lavery (1980) acknowledged this connection when he called for a marshaling of alumni. His work focused on the effective advancement of programs built on successful alumni relations. He found the key to engaging, or marshaling, alumni was through the alumnus connection to faculty and staff with deep-rooted commitment to academic and ethical standards.

Building on the effectiveness of engagement, after a successful capital campaign Michigan Technological University seized the opportunity to chart successful alumni

engagement by creating a life cycle of engagement (see Figure 1). The project received

accolades from Council for Advancement and Support of Education. The whole life cycle of

engagement embraces the notion of building a sense of pride, character, and affinity through

investments in students (Grohowski, 2018). Michigan Technological University found that

investing in students in the short term was also a long-term reinvesting back into the university

from an engagement standpoint (Grohowski, 2018).
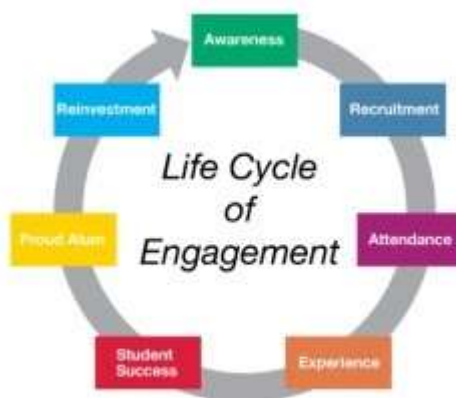
Figure 1

Life Cycle of Engagement, by Michigan Technological University Student Affairs and

Advancement, 2018. http://tinyurl.com/yhz76pmj

An alumni board works best when engaged and connected members serve on it. Alumni

who experienced high levels of happiness and excitement following graduation tend to be more

loyal to and engaged with their university (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2008). Further, positive

relationships between students and college faculty and staff are important not only during their

time at the university but also after they graduate (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). Research on

alumni with a solid connection to university faculty members has suggested alumni will have an increased interest in student learning outcomes and retention policies of the university (Frisby et al., 2019). Individuals who maintain strong connections to the faculty at their alma mater often turn into active alumni who support the university financially, both through service on boards or programs and other forms of cooperation (Bejou, 2005; Frisby et al., 2019; Henning-Thurau et al., 2001).

There is no defined model for alumni relations programs in colleges or universities according to Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE; Wawzenek, 2021). To build ties with graduates, alumni relations staff are often faced with the challenge of alumni spread not just across town, but across the globe. Alumni engagement plays a considerable role in supporting and fostering significant and long-lasting benefits for an institution, such as (a) reinforcing community, (b) creating opportunities for participation, and (c) providing meaningful avenues for service. These advantages, among others, add to a dynamic institution and create a circle of beneficial ways to give back (Cates, 2019).

Collective Community

Alumni from a college or university want to feel like they are a part of a community—and not just any community but one that is meaningful and has a purpose for them. Whether connected to a city, a place of worship, a club, or a social service agency, people want to belong to entities where they feel united to others through a shared sense of identity and mission (Cates, 2019). Human beings crave being a part of flourishing communities where they can connect with others who share their values, cheer for the same mascot, and wear the same school colors.

A study by CASE (Budd, 2019) revealed creating alumni connections and meaningful relationships can be supported by common themes. The study suggested tapping into existing

alumni networks. Often, identifying clusters of alumni in the same city can harness energy for local alumni groups. Also revealed in the survey was that offering unique access to programs and events helped build deep relationships with alumni. A focus on career development was an area identified by alumni to build relationships (Budd, 2019). And finally, alumni indicated building relationships with their alma mater fostered service through mentoring, service on boards and committees, and support of the institution (Budd, 2019).

Engagement Through Giving

Supporting alumni relations and fundraising simultaneously is an example of strategic decision making focused both on the present and the future health of our educational institutions. Major, principal, and planned gifts can be transformational. Such gifts can instantly make a significant and lasting impact on an institution and to change its trajectory. Successful fundraising is most often the result of strong and steadfast engagement that has deepened donors' involvement with the university. Alumni relations plays a fundamental role in this complex work. Alumni engagement offers potential donors a pathway to a more personal and deeper relationship with their institutions and their missions, which can inspire a greater interest in giving.

Alumni relations is built upon the many examples of graduates sharing in the same activities: (a) academic lectures, (b) study trips, (c) affinity group conferences, (d) sporting events, and (e) networking events. When engaged in the life of the institution, alumni can serve an important role of being ambassadors and advocates, amplifying community spirit and creating positive feedback loops (Cates, 2019). Further, how alumni relations staff engage in their alumni communities can be powerful drivers of connection and impact. Active alumni participation,

according to Cates (2019), and engagement can serve as fundamental mechanisms to broadcast and steward the university's brand, image, values, and mission.

Alumni Associations

Alumni associations can look quite different from campus to campus. The basic philosophy behind an alumni association is to develop a network of mutual support that is integral for institutional advancement. Imoke (2011) stated alumni represent a significant and vocal constituency in the university community. In the alumni association, an established lay governing board exists as the alumni board; therein lies the focus of this research. CASE (2013) found the structure of governance varied along with each type of association. Further, associations can be sorted into three categories—independent, dependent, and interdependent—based on the organization and relationship to the institution.

Independent Alumni Association

The independent alumni association structure currently accounts for 12% of all types of alumni associations based on Alumni Access's, Voluntary Alumni Engagement Support of Education (VAESE, 2016) survey. An independent alumni association operates autonomously from the university. It holds a separate corporate status, generates separate financial support, and operates under a different strategic plan. CASE (2013) noted two associational benefits of independence from the university namely, the lack of institutional bureaucracy and a higher degree of engagement from members who join. The institution benefits because they have less obligation to the associations in regard to staffing, which is dealt with solely by the association. Stuart (2016) evaluated alumni associations regarding their long-term financial feasibility. He found university leaders vigorously debated alumni associations on practices, membership, and the practicality of the roles of the staff and board.

The Napa Group (2018) addressed dues-paying memberships (i.e., independent associations) in higher education. They suggested that although members feel a sense of exclusivity with the independent association structure, alumni perceive their donations are to the institution itself, not the association. Members resent paying a fee for things they believe should be free. Furthermore, there is a negative feeling toward marketing efforts by nonmembers. The study found the model held sway for more than a century; however, as financial pressures and the businesslike approach to fundraising in higher education increased, the need to quantify and measure engagement and success put pressure on independent models to shift.

Dependent or Integrated Alumni Association

The 2016 VAESE Benchmarking Report noted 68% of all alumni associations are fully integrated or working toward full integration. There has been an increasing trend of independent alumni associations integrating with their institutions' fundraising or advancement team. Factors that encourage integration include recognition of the similarities of work, audience overlap, and the potential for greater engagement effectiveness. The VAESE (2016) study indicated private institutions have a much higher rate of integration than public institutions (76% to 54%, respectively). Further, the study found that when controlling for total alumni population, associations that are not integrated into fundraising programs tend to have more staff than alumni programs that are integrated with fundraising institutions. The integrated association also has an advantage in containing costs by consolidating backbone functions such as human resources, facilities management, information technology, and finance.

Interdependent Alumni Association

Many colleges and universities recognize the need to increase operational efficiency by leveraging institutional resources, reducing donor confusion, and receiving greater financial

support. The interdependent alumni association model is a viable option for such institutions. Under an interdependent model, the alumni association might be considered a division of the institution, although it operates under a separate corporate status. Worth (2008) suggested under this model, the institution and the alumni association were vested by common strategic goals and values.

Alumni Board Attributes

Under all three types of models, the alumni board exists to offer advice, particularly in areas in which the staff or institution has little expertise or connections. These associations, with aid from alumni boards, provide opportunities for expressing opinions and desires. Banka (2019) suggested they exist to further the interest of those who make decisions. Although there are different types of associations, there are common characteristics across alumni boards:

- Members are selected or appointed from those who attended the institution (McCambridge, 2017).
- Members are selected or appointed through an established process, and membership is not based on a donation (Worth, 2008).
- Institutions maintain connections to associations through alumni relations offices (Fraser & LeMaster, 2013).

According to the Association of Governing Boards, advisory boards with an alumni focus allow administrations to look to volunteers who are willing to offer time, expertise, and funds to enhance their college or university (Worth, 2008). Further, these volunteers can offer guidance, provide advisement, conduct fundraising, and serve as sounding boards and sources of vital feedback (Nagai & Nehla, 2014). At some institutions, volunteers serve on both governing and alumni boards. There are some advantages to dual service, such as creating higher levels of

communication between the groups, enhancing the prestige of the alumni board, and creating a recruiting pipeline for new governing board members.

Board Structure

One of the greatest strengths of higher education is lay governance (Chait et al., 1996). Further, having a powerful, informed, and engaged board is essential for effective lay governance. Campuses across the United States have two types of lay boards—governing and advisory—that are responsible for mission and institutional priorities. Advising boards, as the name suggests, provide nonbinding strategic advice and council, such as recommendations to create a network for graduates, better connect the university to the community, and provide a safe space for administration to discuss potential ideas. This section presents the characteristics of the structure of a particular type of an advisory board—the alumni board.

Elected Board

The election of a board member is made through the selection process established by the membership of the institution or the alumni association. Elections occur by ballot or at annual meetings. Sometimes there is a nominating committee that presents recommended candidates to go before the membership for a vote, allowing board members to have direct input in the selection. Hoover (2008) found elected board members are perceived as more responsive to the needs of the membership. He also noted elected board members often need reelection support, so they are perceived as being more active. However, elected board members' efforts to fulfill the goals of the organization can possibly take a backseat to efforts to retain their position and other political motivations (Alesina & Tabellini, 2007).

Elected boards sometimes have members who change annually, which can create uncertainty in the composition of the organization (Worth, 2014). Worth (2014) found the

change in board members can create variances in expectations, alliances, availability of experts, values, and philosophies. Worth contended this situation creates difficulty in sustaining long-range goals and plans. Additionally, more time is also spent reiterating goals, creating consensus, and developing buy-in on ideas. Elected boards also see an uneven skillset across board members, as their selection can be based on popularity. However, elected boards, as documented by Worth, are less likely to become stale, homogeneous, or uninvolved.

Self-Perpetuating Boards

Self-perpetuating boards are responsible for their own member recruitment, without outside influence. The board establishes initial by-laws that determine terms, elections, and replacements based on contacts or recommendations (Finch, 2017). This model creates a stable board that can focus on long-term goals, establish a strong culture, and achieve continuity of its mission. A significant benefit of this type of board is its ability to recruit members who have specific needed skills or knowledge, such as law, finance, or politics, without external pressure to do so. Further, this type of board is able to target specific candidates to fill vacancies and set a limit on those members who have become stagnant (Worth, 2014).

Self-perpetuating boards also have certain drawbacks. As members serve indefinitely or are consistently reelected, the board can suffer from entrenchment issues. This "forever board member" can become too familiar with the organization or colleagues and consider the emotional reactions of or financial impact on various board members in decision-making processes rather than what is best for the organization (Finch, 2017). Additionally, the board may not be representative of its community (Worth, 2014). Today, college campuses are facing increasingly complex and difficult issues. Fostering alumni diversity on a board brings an expansive array of knowledge, information, and perspectives (Buse et al., 2016). The synergy of

a diverse board creates a powerful dynamic that is ready to meet the challenges that come before its members.

Appointed Boards

Members of an appointed board are selected by someone in authority outside the organization (Worth, 2014). For most public universities, board appointments are to a governing board or board of trustees. In some religious institutions, the appointment is made by the overarching religious organization. Boards may have seats that are appointed as *ex officio*, or given by obligation or privilege by virtue of a person's position (Barlow, 2019). Ex officio members may include past presidents, deans, state officials, or board chairs. Other appointments to a board can be made by the alumni association, the university foundation, office of faculty affairs, or the student body. The appointed positions are usually established in the by-laws of the association.

Governance literature on appointed boards offer some guidance for efficiency, but most of the research frameworks used a fundraising lens (e.g., Chait et al, 1991, 2005; Curran & Totten, 2010). Appointed boards with seats filled by donors, and fundraising is mentioned as an important aspect of many councils (Worth, 2008). Increasing donor presence on college boards makes it increasingly important to explore their impact on the boards (Bourgeois, 2013). Fama and Jenson (1983) contended that having major donors serve in board seats is an important mechanism for monitoring efficiency within an organization. This can be compared to having major shareholders on a corporate board. Boards with donors are viewed as accountable to, good stewards of, and efficient for the appointing authority (Fama & Jenson, 1983). Further, having large donors appointed to board seats acts as a creditable signal to others that the institution is a good custodian of resources (Callen et al., 2003).

The appointed board can be active while maintaining stability, much like the self-perpetuating board. According to McCambridge (2017), appointment of board members help to ensure congenial working relationships and continuity of services, programs, and ideologies over time. Alternatively, issues may arise from the different interests and loyalties of board members, which may lead to conflict or impasses for the group. Appointments can also be political in nature (Curran & Totten, 2010).

Staffing

Boards recognize the established duty standards of care, loyalty, and obedience (Price, 2018). Effective boards require a working relationship and mutual support between the board, the chair, and the alumni staff working with the board. Some people have the impression the traditional structure of boards, with their conventional job descriptions and committees, is a rigid, top-down hierarchy, but this often is not the case. In many organizations, the chair and staff actually facilitate and guide the board members in performing their duties. McNamara (2008) suggested a successful working relationship—a "strategic partnership"—between the board members and staff is one of the most important criteria for a high-performing organization. Chait (1995) noted identifying board members, and then investing nothing in them and expecting success, is nonsensical. Board investment, or feeding, requires partnering with staff to allow everyone to take ownership in the success of the organization. However, there is a lack of research specifically related to alumni association staff who are employed by a college or university or independently by the association that works directly with alumni boards.

Professional Staff

The 2006 Association of Governing Boards survey, noted in Worth's (2008) work, indicated the responsibility of working with a board usually requires more focus than the

president, vice president, or dean can provide. Consequently, university leaders often appoint a staff member to attend to these efforts. These appointed duties include: (a) setting agendas, (b) creating board packets, (c) budgeting, (d) arranging travel, (e) scheduling meetings, (f) conducting orientations, (g) executing plans, and (h) serving as a liaison to the institution. Alumni staff are not board members and rarely have voting rights, but many play valuable roles as negotiators, advisors, or committee members. In such roles, they contribute valuable institutional knowledge, insights, and history that are needed to make informed decisions.

Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981) examined role orientations of professional staff and boards. They found decisions made by these boards are strongly influenced by professional staff. Further, board members accepted the board staff as policy advisors, but the professional staff wanted a more active role in actual policy formulation. Having staff in such active roles could be beneficial, as staff present policy recommendations, negotiate with outside actors, and largely control the flow of information to the board. Sabatier and Mazmanian also found board members were more likely to support suggestions made by staff members with more formal education and a higher engagement or activity level. They noted there is a considerable difference between staff members' and board members' views concerning the proper role of staff in policymaking. According to Kezar (2006), staff believed they should provide real leadership in terms of suggesting innovations and recommendations, although board members generally thought staff should serve as advisors and implementers. More clarity is needed regarding the specific roles that should be played by staff. Worth (2014) urged boards to identify clear roles for both board members and staff members and to reiterate them often.

Clear roles are needed to establish expectations, limitations, and boundaries for staff and board members. Understanding roles can also help prevent alumni staff from being overpowered

by board members or becoming rubber stamp board allowing the alumni association to do all the work. As dues-paying alumni associations diminish, the existence and role of university boards remain in question.

Boards staffed by professionals are fortunate to have dedicated individuals to provide knowledge, time, and materials for board members. However, Kezar's (2006) research on boards found staff often provide too much or inaccurate information to board members. Many staff members are overly eager and share more information than is needed, while other staff members are overextended and find it difficult to provide the precise information that boards need. Kezar recommended professional staff work closely with board chairs to determine the amount of information to provide. Additionally, boards should have an ongoing orientation on mission, vision, and goals to continually educate the full board, not just incoming members (Kezar, 2006).

Alumni Director Qualities of Leadership

Of the alumni organizations surveyed in the 2016 VAESE report, 72% reported having six or fewer full-time staff. These positions often include executive director, membership director, and alumni director. The alumni director is an expert who principally acts in an advisory capacity to the board, alumni volunteers, and the university. They should be an institutional expert and have a detailed focus based on the nature and magnitude of the institutions' mission (O'Connell, 2003). The alumni director works with the board president and board members by performing research, doing groundwork, and maintaining alumni interest to advance intentions for the college or university. The VAESE report found 68% of alumni directors were concerned with the lack of engagement of alumni. As someone who must encourage engagement in volunteer dedication, involvement, and satisfaction, an alumni director

needs to be open minded, succinct, service minded, and skilled at balancing multiple stakeholders' interests.

Scope of Board Duties

One of the challenges alumni boards often face is defining the scope of their purview. Board members sometimes know their institution's mission, history, and values, but have a limited perspective on what is expected from the alumni association. Board scope involves determining and documenting a list of specific deliverables, features, functions, tasks, deadlines, and goals. In other words, the scope defines what needs to be achieved by the board and the work that must be done to meet the board's purpose.

An alumni association may establish a board to bring together a group with a vested interest on a targeted matter. Examples include: (a) a board of recent graduates to address employment opportunities, (b) a parent board to address family engagement, or (c) a capital campaign. These boards are established with a narrow focus and involve members who are familiar with the specific focus of the board and are vested in taking specific action. A targeted focus examines benefits for the target market and loyalty toward the institution (Brown & Iverson, 2004). Additionally, boards with a clearly defined niche have centralized governance and high efficiency in maintaining defined services. Once these boards meet their targeted goal, they may choose to disband or to choose a new issue. In other instances, these boards are part of larger boards, such as a parents and family board being a subunit of an institutional alumni board. Division associations focus on alumni who have specific needs pertaining to a particular discipline. The college-level groups collaborate with their specific alumni, while the larger university-level association addresses more expansive matters (Worth, 2008).

Alternatively, a broadly focused alumni board can cast a wide net around the issues, intent, and goals of a college or university. The major benefit of using a broad focus is that it can lead to an abundance of positive results for the institution or alumni association. Another benefit is that it facilitates reaching out to alumni, faculty, administrators, legislators, and students. No board will reach and be the voice for everyone, but a broad focus is likely engage more alumni, create more interest, and increase bandwidth. Brown and Iverson (2004) noted one advantage of a broad board focus is that it can provide insight into new areas of focus or expanded services for the institution.

Boards must sometimes rewrite their familiar playbook to meet goals for the institution. However, when boards comprise people who possess great wisdom and experience, but whose full potential is not tapped, a shift in focus is sometimes necessary. Gast and Smith (2011) described the importance of shifting focus to strengthen boards, and they identified five keys to keep a board focused:

- connect the experiences of board members to on-campus challenges,

- inform, do not just report,

- be open about shortcomings,

- build a culture of active participation, and

- commit to long-term partnerships and learning.

Gast and Smith (2011) also noted focusing on the scope and needs of an institution allows board members to better understand their commitment and how they can make meaningful contributions to the institution.

Variation in Board Size

An association's charter or by-laws dictate the size of its board. These governing documents are based on tradition, history, and the needs of the organization (Casteen, 2014). Chait et al. (2005) stated most small boards want to be larger and most large boards want to be smaller. It stands to reason a smaller board would look to increase its size to improve fundraising, add diversity, or create influence, while a large board might want to decrease its size to increase effectiveness, prevent "free riders," and enhance collegiality. Chait et al. (2005) suggested "one board's problem is another board's solution" (p. 175). Determining the best size for a board is a complicated, yet crucial, undertaking.

Scholarly research on the optimal board composition for efficiency, performance, and maximum organizational effectiveness is not conclusive (de Andrés-Alonso et al., 2009; Robinson, 2001; Stripling, 2012; Worth, 2008). Some authors have suggested there is no optimal board composition, and one size does not fit all when it comes to corporate and nonprofit governance (Coles et al., 2008; Faleye, 2007; Robinson, 2001; Stone, 2005). Each college and university alumni board has different needs based on its individual characteristics; therefore, optimal board composition is difficult to define (Andres-Alonoso et al., 2009). Additionally, factors such as internal and external forces, governance, institutional structure, relationship between the alumni board and the institution, history, and location impact the size of a board. According to McCambridge (2017), the function of a board should drive its overall structure. In determining its perfect size, a board should consider what needs to be accomplished by the alumni association and the institution, whether the mission affects the size of the board, what the desired group dynamic is, and the current stability of the board.

Larger alumni boards in colleges and universities experience higher board member engagement levels in marketing feedback loops, rotational leadership, and constant socialization of group norms (Chait et al., 2005). Further, one key aspect of having a large board is the ability to access member skills and use these strengths through committee work to make workflow easier to delegate. An additional benefit is the ability of committees to break up the larger group, thereby increasing all members' opportunities to be heard. Although boards are becoming more diverse, they still include a relatively small proportion of minority and outside members. Members of minority groups account for 21% of the nation's estimated public college trustees and only 12% of private college trustees (Fain, 2005). A larger board could allow for an increase in diversity and outside stakeholder perspectives (de Andrés-Alonso, 2009).

Alternatively, Stripling (2012) posited a larger board that includes members with the best intentions and engaged members can run the risk of complicating even the simplest board meeting. Further, Stripling (2012) suggested avoiding dysfunctional meetings and bridle the number of members, he noted this allows more voices to be heard. Larger boards have a greater tendency to form cliques, fall prey to "group think," and not fully engage all members in a meaningful way. Often, large alumni boards shift real deliberation and discussion to executive committees in preference of limited engagement or never have real discussion. This can make actual board members feel like honorary board members (McCambridge, 2017).

Over the past 20 years, there has been a decrease in overall advisory board size, including alumni boards (McCambridge, 2017). There is a stronger focus on best practices in board governance that is centered on the quality of board members rather than the quantity (Price, 2018). Pfeffer (1972) found "board size and composition are not random or independent factors, but are, rather rational organizational responses to the conditions of the external environment"

(p. 226). Some scholars (e.g., Dalton et al., 1999; Pearce & Zahra, 1992) are quick to question board size and the positive link to financial performance suggesting board size is based not only on environment, but also on the organization's strategy and prior financial performance.

The literature on smaller boards has suggested a focus on recruiting quality members rather than simply more members. With smaller numbers, board members can become more familiar with one another, take greater ownership of their institution, and be more candid with each other (McCambridge, 2017). Smaller boards are more likely to make faster decisions, have greater ownership, show greater commitment, and form an easier consensus (Chait et al., 2005). LeBlanc (2017) noted Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) experienced major changes when the decision was made to reduce its board size. The new, smaller SNHU board was able to act more quickly, make impromptu decisions, eliminate power committees, spend less time on committee reports and more time on true issues, and increase quality interactions. Additionally, SNHU found that a smaller board improved the quality of the material that staff provided, as the focus shifted from massive amounts of materials to truly engaging and pertinent content.

Board Processes

Board processes are the tasks and activities board staff support and facilitate in a board's decision-making activities (Zahra & Pearce, 1989). Ong and Wan (2001) identified four process variables for boards based on group and top management team studies conducted by other researchers (e.g., Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Forbes & Milliken, 1999; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). These four process variables are effort norms, conflict, presence or use of knowledge and skills, and cohesiveness. Applying these process variables to board performance, Ong and Wan examined members' ability to execute their roles and identified three main themes: (a) monitoring, (b) service, and (c) strategic planning. They found the dynamics of board processes

impact the board and company performance. Jehn and Priti (1997) found process conflicts hamper board members' ability to focus on board task assignments and to work efficiently. On a more practical note, understanding the dimensions of board processes can lead to better use of boards to maximize their contributions (Ong & Wan, 2001).

Having a clear and smooth process for selecting board members is one piece of evidence of a board's effectiveness (Finkelstein & Mooney, 2003). The board members, nominating committee, and board director must work together to identify quality candidates. Nadler (2004) found selecting high-quality board members was a complex and often difficult process and more than 40% of boards lacked an effective process for member selection. To accomplish the goal of recruiting effective board members, Adams et al. (2003) recommended a long-term recruitment process that vetted the candidate over a period of time through casual interactions. Additionally, they noted the importance of looking at the personal knowledge, skills, and experiential background of current board makeup to determine gaps that need to be filled. These gaps could be in strategic planning, finance, legal matters, or long-range planning. Selecting board members who have the needed knowledge and prowess in industry products or services can help to lead the organization toward innovative solutions.

There is no simple process, formula, or strategy a board can follow that ensures successful implementation of creative and innovative ideas. However, boards are in a unique position to create initiatives related to creativity and innovation. As such, innovative boards suggest new strategies, question stagnate processes, and look for result-oriented solutions using intellectual capital, which draws from corporate strategies. Intellectual capital is the sum of employee expertise, organizational processes, and other intangibles that contribute to the bottom line. Managers realize the importance of intellectual capital and its contributions to the

organization (Janicot et al., 2015). With over 50% of new products failing ever year, innovative firms may look to board composition as the strategic component of market success (Zenou et al., 2020). Boards show the most innovation when they focus on the areas of marketing, services, and process (Jaskyte, 2017). Boards that have marketing, service, and process as goals and include board members with marketing experience, multiple seats on various boards, and a large social network were found to be the most engaged in innovation (Zenou et al., 2020). Although there has been research on innovative boards and best practices, there is a paucity of scholarly research related to how alumni boards use innovation.

Campus Consolidations

Mergers in higher education present campus cultural challenges that create the need for strategies to address the multiple groups impacted. As competition for students, resources, productive faculty, and state increases universities are at a crossroads: closures or mergers to maintain the organization's livelihood (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). In the United States, mergers occurred in private colleges to combine single sex institutions with coeducational institutions and a more robust educational program and in public colleges to create multicampus institutions (Azziz et al., 2019; Martin & Samels, 1994; Millet, 1976). Gains certainly included (a) financial implications, (b) establishing economies of scale, (c) program expansions, and (d) reinvigorating stakeholders. A study on mergers in higher education (Azziz et al., 2019) found using the "20-60-20" rule during a merger resulted in 20% of stakeholders immediately embracing the changes, 60% who sit on the fence to watch, and 20% who will unwaveringly oppose it. They found actively engaging the 20% who are committed and work to convert the 60% is an effective approach to engage stakeholders. Campus consolidations come with considerations including (a)

rebranding costs, (b) reactions of the university community, (c) addressing human capital needs, (d) establishing necessary infrastructure and (e) addressing campus culture issues.

Merged Campus Boards

The stakeholders in a merged board are often varied and not of a single mindset (Aziz et al., 2019). Further, boards in higher education, according to work by Aziz et al. (2019), often have a number of stakeholders that bring a greater vice and a wide variety of priorities to the group. When a board is brought together after a campus merger the voices of stakeholders agree that the board should provide a quality good, but often merged groups misalign on agreeing on what is quality or even the good of the institution (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). As such, alumni are often highly influential and powerful forces in the university therefore, establishing unity early post consolidation aids in board effectiveness (Forbes & Milliken, 1999).

A recent study by Aziz et al. (2019) on campus consolidations looked at the mergers of campus boards. While the focus was primarily on governing boards many themes can be applied to alumni boards as well. The study offered that a significant responsibility of governing boards in higher education is to have the right leaders and to support that leader during the merger process even when if it turns bad. Boards must understand mergers are difficult and complex and often opposition will occur. Additionally, the study said under no circumstance should the board assume a merger to test the waters and see how it goes. The study suggested mergers will always go rough and it is generally not pretty. Finally, the board should make all possible efforts to protect campus leadership involved in the merger process or the alumni director for alumni boards. Supporting the alumni director to focus on the job at hand helps to safeguard the future success of the board and protects the successful career of dedicated leaders often left exposed during board mergers.

Theoretical Framework

Over 40 years have passed since the publishing of Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*. Their work in resource dependence theory (RDT) represented a change in the path for the field of organization studies. The principle foundation was social context mattered, and the environment is important in understanding organizations (Hillman et al., 2009; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003). The theory maintained the importance of the environment of organizations for decision making on issues include hiring, board composition, mergers, and alliances. The resource dependence approach is the ability to acquire and maintain resources is essential to organizational survival. Further, the board plays a crucial role in creating exchanges because no institution controls all the resources it needs to survive. These exchanges help to reduce interdependencies in the organization's operating environment (Miller-Millesen, 2003). Through board member networking, contacts, and interaction, institutions can gain access to information and resources to reduce uncertainty. Miller-Millesen (2003) found RDT highlights the board's boundary-spanning responsibility and provides insight into the ways in which power and influence have the capacity to bias resource allocation decisions.

Scholarly examination of RDT provides valuable guidance for those who seek an understanding of the interorganizational partnering. RDT is framed by three guiding principles. First, an organization needs resources to meet goals and ultimately survive. Second, organizations seek resources both internally and from external environments. Finally, RDT recognizes power, dependence, and independence play critical roles in the organization. Organizations require resources obtained from their environment. When resources are acquired, it leads to organizational power, impact, and long-term constancy. Ultimately, organizations

come together to secure the resources critical to their survival and growth (Pfeffer & Leong, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003).

RDT looks to different strategies to obtain resources with differing levels of coordination and degrees of independence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003). In this section, I describe the major RDT strategies of merging, forming an alliance, and co-option. There is relevant literature to support each strategy. However, a noted limitation of RDT is the relevant literature is written from a generic tradition with no distinction made to nonprofit, profit, and private sectors. Terms such as mergers and alliances are often defined differently across literature. I take the approach of a broader labeling for this reason.

It is important to state I looked at institutions that have experienced a campus consolidation. As Seltzer (2019) noted, although mergers are a well-tested approach to rapidly securing growth, stability, and value careful strategic planning is necessary so as to consider all that could be affected such as an alumni board. Although little scholarly research exists on board transition in postsecondary institutions, looking to nonprofit and corporate literature helps to frame board structure post consolidation.

In this study, I looked at RDT as it applied to alumni boards. As campus leadership develops approaches to consolidate campuses and entities it encompasses, one challenge often laden with history, tradition, and emotion is the how to consolidate the alumni boards. The internal and external dynamics that influence the decisions made on how to combine two or possibly more entities interest me. I looked to RDT literature on mergers, alliances, and co-option as a framework to examine the consolidation of alumni boards and to offer knowledge on the roles alumni play whiles serving on alumni boards.

Creating Mergers

As nonprofit organizations have become increasingly more commercialized, scholars argue RDT is one of the main reasons. As state support decreases and competition between private and nonprofit sector increases, nonprofit organizations use marketization techniques such as mergers to compete for resources to maintain their organization's livelihood (Malatesta & Smith, 2014)**.** *Mergers* are described by Trautwein (1990) as transactions in which the ownership of companies or organizations is transferred or combined with other entities. A distinct aspect is a merger allows the entity to grow, decrease, or even change strategy. Merging involves greater levels of coordination, as opposed to other strategies, and inhibits interdependence management.

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978/2003), there are three types of mergers in RDT: (a) vertical integration, (b) horizontal expansion, and (c) diversification. *Vertical integration* is the merger of two or more entities that produce different products or services along the supply chain toward the production of some final product. *Horizontal expansion* occurs when competitors rely on the same base as a funding source, acting as a system to increase power and reduce competition or uncertainty. And finally, *diversification* occurs when an organization acquires another with the intent to produce differing services, products, or pursuits. Mergers in governmental or nonprofit organizations are linked to a strategy to combine similar programs to reduce competition. Yin and Shanley (2008) stated RDT is the most dominate theory used to explain why mergers occur.

RDT recognizes the influence of external factors on organization behavior (Hillman et al., 2009). In their board taxonomy, Hillman et al. (2000) maintained the board member plays the role of meeting the internal resource dependency needs of the organization by providing knowledge and expertise regarding the strategy and day-to-day management. Hillman et al.

further separated board members into business experts, support specialists, and community influencers. Business experts provide for the strategy and competitive resource needs of the firm. Support specialists such as, attorneys, bankers, or accountants provide technical expertise directly related to their areas of specialty. Community influencers provide for the resource dependence needs of the organization that are related to stakeholders of the organization. Additionally, outside board members reputation and status, according to Hillman et al., also aid in providing for the legitimacy needs of the institution. RDT is key to underpinning the normative board roles and responsibilities to acquire and maintain resources essential for institutions.

Research on Mergers

Research by Yin and Shanley (2008) suggested RDT is a dominate way to explain mergers, but they also indicated three reasons for mergers. First, research on the acquisition of partners by Walter and Barney (1990) found managing resource dependence is common when there is a buyer–seller relationship. Walter and Barney found horizontal mergers are more often associated with multiple purposes such as achieving economies of scale, resources acquisition, and using multiple current competencies rather than one overall major goal. Second, mergers are often motivated to reduce competition, the desire to introduce economies of scale to this sector, or to improve effectiveness and efficiency (La Piana, 2010). Third, research on effectiveness and efficiency suggest less gains than perceived. The loss of organizational identity shifts away from core mission, decreases morale, drains personnel, and disrupts program resources (Cortez et al., 2009; La Piana, 2010; Meier, 1980).

Forming Alliances

Alliances are considered a union or association of two or more organizations with an affinity in interests, nature, or qualities sharing the same set of knowledge or resources (Scott & Davis, 2007). An alliance offers less constraints and requires lower levels of coordination. Williamson (1975) went further to refer to alliances as hybrid governance. However, unlike mergers, alliances allow partial absorption of interdependencies allowing organizations to maintain a sense of autonomy. Malatesta and Smith (2014) supported that alliances are often formed when power is balanced, such as in similar sized organizations or similar providers of a service. Additionally, partners seek a stable environment that minimizes the risk of one partner exploiting the other. Earlier studies by Boyle (1968) and Pate (1969) indicated joint ventures are likely between buyers and sellers. Later work by Pfeffer and Nowak (1967) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978/2003) was consistent with the findings that alliances are motivated by resource uncertainty.

Alliance Benefits and Cautions

The benefits of RDT in alliances includes: (a) creating trust, (b) increasing organization learning, (c) cost saving, and (d) a diffused risk (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003; Ren et al. 2009). Alliances can also increase the trust in partners, which Ren et al. (2009) found to be a factor in determining success in organizations. However, there are cautions associated with forming alliances. Organizations can experience mission drift, loss of public accountability, and a difficulty in measuring performance when alliances occur. Malatesta and Smith (2014), though supporting RDT in respect to alliances, cited the broad and inconsistent use of the term alliances limits the researcher to fully ascertain the level of consistency across findings.

Co-Option Establishment

Co-option is the process of adding members to an elite group at the discretion of members of the body, usually to manage decisions and maintain the stability of the group (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). As an RDT strategy, co-opting offers less coordination than mergers and can be effective in reducing dependences. By introducing external actors in decision making through co-opting managers reduce dependence, acquire vital resources, and coordinate actions with independent entries from the environment (Provan, 1980). The RDT literature offered co-opting as an effective strategy to increase support and add new skills, with little cost (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003). The subtle approach is less likely to be viewed as intrusive and is less likely to be viewed as divisive in an organization. Additionally, introducing important interlocking board members is an attractive strategy to secure needed connections. Alternatively, co-opting does introduce board members from other sectors, which could change the dynamics or culture of the board, bring new perspectives not aligned with the original goals, and add new funders could lead to mission drift for an organization.

Co-Opting in Boards

Nonprofits often add board members to access resources, funding, advice, donations, or increase legitimacy (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998; Grønbjerg, 1993; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). To improve an organization's positions, co-opting two entities takes two forms: horizontal coordination and interlocking boards.

Horizontal Coordination. Horizontal coordination allows organizations to establish a relationship to increase performance or to meet a goal (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998). In the nonprofit sector, organizations often rely on government support, private contributions, and commercial activity to attain goals and remain solvent (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). In situations

where failure is otherwise likely, government contracting to provide services beyond the government's expertise has resulted in horizontal coordination. Such cases—often joint boards or liaison positions—are established to reduced uncertainty and create authenticity. There are cautions associated with horizontal coordination, which Brooks (2000) referred to as a subsidy trap. In such situations, the nonprofit becomes beholden to the government or contract and often places board members with connections to public entities that crowd out board members with mission expertise, ultimately, leading to mission drift.

Interlocking Boards. Interlocking board studies suggest members on multiple boards influence interdependences both in and across organizations (Hillman, 2005; Pusser et al., 2006). Specifically, boards are important providers of resources such as advice, council, communication, information, and legitimacy (Hillman, 2005; Pusser et al., 2006). In postsecondary boards, organizations more directly affected by government regulation are more likely to seek board members possessing political acumen (Lang & Lockhart, 1990). Possessing political insight on public policy and the political process opens channels for communications between organizations and political decision makers.

As postsecondary institutions face increasing pressures to secure funding due to a retreat in state and federal support, boards look for strategies to offer support. University administrators seek to gain every advantage, pursuing alliances between the institution and private sector, including connections to (a) facilities, (b) laboratories, (c) faculty, (d) students, and (e) the intellectual capital of the university (Bok, 2003). Pusser et al. (2006) explored the idea of board interlock from the dynamics of the university trustee, rather than the customary cooperate framework and from the dynamics of the university trustee. Accordingly, looking at university

trustees provides insight into their roles as foundations for information, their abilities to provide legitimacy for the institution, and an understanding of institutional organizational behavior.

Corporate Roots

Researchers frequently look to director interlock, or individuals concurrently on more than one board, as elements that shape corporate governance. Such studies are often based in Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978/2003) work in resource dependence supporting that boards are a means to seek needed resources, serve as a source of legitimacy, and the involvement of director interlocks are essential to such functions (Pusser et al., 2006). The effects of interlocks include (a) greater access to resources, capital, and information; and (b) stronger relations with resources providers. Additionally, boards can have members who are in competing areas but serve on a third board. This indirect interlock is interesting in higher education according to Burt (1983) as board members are beneficial in providing strategy, best practices, and information key to the institution.

Postsecondary Analysis

Before the work of Pusser et al. (2006), there was no empirical data on the relationships and flow of information as they related to decision making and strategy in governing boards in postsecondary institutions. Pusser's work sought to examine the role of governing boards in establishing and maintaining strategies, policies, forms of authority, and legitimate behavior in 20 prominent research universities in 2000. The findings showed boards at private institutions are larger than public institutions and are considerably more interconnected to the corporate world through overlapping directorships (Pusser et al., 2006). There is a similarity in the representation of business sector representation in both public and private boards. However, public institutions have a distinguishing feature of connections to the banking industry, whereas

private institutions are connected to a wide range of what is considered new economy firms (i.e., software, electronics, or pharmaceuticals). Considering the degree to which advantages are achieved through board interlock, underpinned by RDT, helps to frame research for other types of boards in postsecondary education.

Academic Capitalism

Today universities struggle to balance essential financial support and their core tenets of teaching and learning. To ascend from this financial purgatory, universities have become more entrepreneurial by creating new economic markets by developing new networks between the private and public sectors, establishing research patents, and licensing university brands to create returns. This process was first defined and theorized by scholars Larry Leslie, Gary Rhoades, and Sheila Slaughter as academic capitalism. Their first book, *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University,* looked at the globalization and the effects on labor markets in academia (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The second book, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education,* looked at academic capitalism in higher education as it relates to new global economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

RDT suggests organizations deprived of crucial revenues will seek new resources. The theory of academic capitalism is the pursuit of market and market-like activities to generate external revenues, but unlike resource dependency theory the lines are boundaries among markets, states and higher education are blurry (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Academic capitalism theory is characterized by creating new networks of actors that expand boundaries for institutions into public and private sectors (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) suggested U.S. colleges and universities are shifting from a public good knowledge regime or valuing knowledge as a public good to which the general citizenry has claims. But

rather moving toward an "academic capitalist knowledge regime" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 28), which is knowledge privatization and profit taking in which institutions, faculty, and sponsoring corporations have claims that come before those of the public. Academic capitalism suggests that universities are not victims of the transformation but rather are active players engaged in the opportunity to change financial status.

Discussion

RDT is the ability to acquire and maintain resources essential to organizational survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003). As such, no institution controls all the resources it needs to survive; therefore, alumni boards play crucial roles in creating resource exchanges. As colleges and universities integrate into new economies, academic capitalism sees groups of actors (i.e., alumni, faculty, administrations, students) using a variety of resources to create new circuits of knowledge and resources (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). As the landscape of higher education continues to change, campus consolidations impact alumni boards.

RDT creates a successful lens, according to Hilman et al. (2009), in understanding how universities create goals that centers on the three-part mission and the importance external actors pay in securing resources to attain goals. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978/2003) found that resource dependency theory is a framework to understand the effects the environment has on an organization. The three main tenets of RDT are (a) organizational effectiveness, (b) the environment and its effects on resources, and (c) the constraints the environment places on an organization. When an organization is deprived necessary resources (e.g., funding, donors, or representation), the organization will seek new resources. Alumni boards create a nexus between the institutional needs and resources to the resource providers allowing an institution to secure needed resources.

The relatively powerful RDT provides alumni boards opportunity to think through approaches like merging, alliances, and co-option. Studies on nonprofit restructuring indicated merger activity is spurred by the desire of leadership to reduce competition for funding, the introduction of economies of scale, and the opportunity to improve effectiveness (LaPiana, 2010). Campus consolidations occur often as the schools are serving similar populations. Additionally, the alumni boards from such institutions are also seeking mergers to reduce competition as well. Resources are key to college's or university's success and that access and control over resources is a basis of power, an idea underpinning competition of alumni boards for funding, expertise, political capital, students, donors, and additional resources (Hillman et al., 2009; Malatesta & Smith, 2014). Additionally, a merged alumni board can be seen by the institution as a combination of resources such as alumni engagement, networking connections, or funding. I assumed alumni boards in consolidated institutions merged to reduce competition for resources. Of further interest to me is to determine if alumni board members aid the institution in gaining resources after a campus consolidation.

Improving alumni board effectiveness through the merger process could take the form of consolidation, streamlining the decision-making authority, or increasing effectiveness over a new market. By applying RDT to new markets through an alumni board lens, institutions could reach diverse populations, emerging fields, or additional emerging resources. It is my assumption that if alumni board members understand their responsibilities and roles, the board will be more effective in achieving goals.

RDT is the dominant theory in explaining why organizations engage in mergers; however, there are cautions. One downside to a merger is that one or both organizations can experience a loss of identity. Further, boards, alumni, faculty, and students can experience a loss

of identity if a new institution is created (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). This identity loss could be a

mascot, logo, or coveted campus traditions. Additionally, a merger can create mission drift

making an alumni board unsure of institutional priorities and uncertain on roles. Finally, mergers

create strains on staff, programs, resources, and the roles alumni boards play with them

(Malatesta & Smith, 2014). All aspects of a merger process could impact the resource

dependency.

Alliances in alumni boards are prevalent when power is balanced between partners such

as two alumni boards from merged institutions—there is minimized risk, and one institution will

not exploit the other. The benefits for an alumni board to form an alliance include (a) cost

savings, (b) increased resource availability, and (c) creating a sense of community. Cautions also

include mission drift and a decrease to measure performance. RDT is applied through the study

to explore how alliances affect the balance of power in the board.

As mergers and alliances require increased coordination, co-optation requires less

coordination and is effective in reducing dependence. Co-optation occurs when a person or

people are introduced to an alumni board and has, at the least, an appearance of making or

influencing a decision (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). This could be a parent's council, student

group, or topic specific group. These external actors are introduced as a bridging mechanism to

reduce dependence.

RDT, through board interlock, offers insight on board members as sources of resources

(e.g., financial, networking), information, legitimacy, and effective institutional organization and

behavior. This study looked specifically at alumni serving on boards as important providers of

resources such as (a) advice, (b) counsel, (c) communication, (d) information, and (e) legitimacy

(Hillman, 2005; Pusser et al., 2006). As board members serve on the boards of multiple

organizations, institutions, and corporations, two such organizations have a direct interlock if a member of one organization is also member of the other. Such connections allow institutions to increase their influence by exerting power as a group and to work together toward common goals (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

When all research is considered, only the academic leaders at a particular institution can determine whether looking at RDT as a framework for alumni boards is truly applicable and practical for their campus. RDT provides avenues for future research due to the various conceptualizations of mergers, alliances, co-option, and other strategies. The intent of this study was to provide research that will help inform administration and alumni board decision making and perhaps raise points they might not have otherwise considered.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study aimed to illuminate alumni boards and their engagement in higher education by looking at characteristics, roles, and responsibilities expected of board members. Further, the study examined how the dimensions of alumni board structure, selection (e.g., elected, appointed, self-perpetuating), staffing, scope, and size provide insight into board roles and responsibilities for college administration, board members, and institutions. I provide further discernment of the resources provided by alumni board members to potentially aid the institution in member acumen. Additionally, this research contributes to best practices for alumni boards and the oversight they provide for the institutions they serve. To examine the relationship between alumni boards and the university, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are alumni boards after a campus consolidation organized relative to structure, serving, staffing, scope, and size?

2. How do alumni board members characterize their roles and responsibilities and what is central to their priorities?

3. How do alumni directors articulate their roles and the roles of alumni board members? What are alumni director priorities for alumni board members?

4. To what extent are alumni boards' organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of their board members related to broader campus priorities and resources?

As a researcher, I feel that stating to the reader up front what this dissertation is examining is important. My desire was not simply to describe what happens at an alumni board meeting, but to analyze the experiences through interviews, documentation, and observations bringing to light themes to guide future decision making for the alumni association. The following sections describe the framework I used as a blueprint for this study including the design of the research, selection of site, selection of participants, data collection, and analysis.

Research Design

This research is influenced by personal skills, training, and experiences accumulated from working with boards for 2 decades. Based on my practices and experiences working with alumni boards, this study employed an interpretive approach to examine the roles and responsibilities of an alumni board at Georgia Southern University. The interpretivist perspective addresses a detail an event or issue thoroughly and explores the meaning experiences, events, and states hold for participants, which is unlike the positivist approach of testing predominate theory (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Qualitative Case Study

The qualitative case study method explores real life over a period through deep and multiple levels of data collection (Creswell, 2014). To better understand the varying dimension and to examine the intricacy of alumni boards, this study used the case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). A *case study* "is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used" and the "object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system" (Stake, 2006, pp. 443, 445). As such this research looked to Stake's ideologies to examine alumni boards. Studying a case allowed me to focus on the uniqueness and multiplicity of the alumni board to discern its activity in and role in higher education. This study investigated the alumni

board and how it functions and further explored how the phenomenon operates or exists in the environment.

Despite similarities among institutions of higher education, each campus has a unique culture reflected through its mission, leadership, customs, socialization, and decision making. These distinctive cultural elements have significant influence after a campus consolidation has occurred. Stake (1995) stated the real focus of case study is particularization. He further outlined seeking both the common and particulars about a case by drawing on the following:

- the nature of the case,

- the case's historical background,

- the physical setting,

- other cases through which this case is recognized, and

- those informants through whom the case can be known.

This study looked at an institution using identified concepts of a campus consolidation and the organizational structure of the external affairs division at a public institution. Based on Stake (2006), the single case study is intrinsic with the intent to maximize what can be learned from the case. The time and access to participants was limited, therefore, the single case approach allowed a deeper meaning and focus. Additionally, the participants had only recently undergone the campus consolidation and the experience remained relevant to the board members. Further, choosing this case allowed me to see the intricacies and complexities within the single case.

For the purpose of this study, I examined Georgia Southern University to consider its distinct consolidation experience and to gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities required of board members. Intrinsic case study is based upon the researcher having deep seated

interest in this particular alumni board (Stake, 1995). Further, in selecting a unique case to study the aim is not based upon understanding other cases, but rather to understand this one case, Georgia Southern University.

The case study method used in the study of the Georgia Southern University Alumni Board allowed me to establish context on the selection process, staffing, resources, scope, experiences, and size of alumni boards. Using this approach allowed me to focus on the characteristics evident in the case. Consequently, the timing of the study was less than 2 years after the campus consolidation; therefore, I was able to focus closely on the alumni board to (a) observe the board in action, (b) interview members to gain insight, and (c) examine how a board exists on a college campus while the experience was relevant (Stake, 2006). See Appendix A for Internal Review Board documents to support this research.

Georgia Southern University

Georgia Southern University is a public research university with approximately 26,000 undergraduate and graduate students in Southeast. The institution conferred 5,760 degrees in 2019 and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (Georgia Southern University, 2020a). The land grant university, established in 1908, had a fiscal year operating budget of $345,889,202 for 2021 (Georgia Southern University, 2020c). The budget encompasses three campuses located in Savannah, Hinesville, and the main campus in Statesboro, Georgia. The mission of the institution is:

> At Georgia Southern University, our learner-centered culture prepares us to think, lead, teach, and serve. We value collaboration, academic excellence, discovery and innovation, integrity, openness and inclusion, and sustainability. We promote talent and economic development to enhance quality of life through scholarly pursuits, cultural enrichment,

student life, and community engagement across distinctive campuses. Our success is

measured by the global impact of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. (Georgia

Southern University, 2020d, para. 1)

Georgia Southern University went through a consolidation with Armstrong State

University in 2018. At the time of consolidation, Armstrong State University had approximately

32,000 alumni and Georgia Southern University had around 89,000 (Georgia Southern

University, 2020a). All alumni are members of the Georgia Southern University alumni

association, which is an integrated or dependent association model with overlapping

advancement, communications, and operational units. The alumni association's board of

directors is made up of 37 members from Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State

University and four ex-officio members. The board falls under purview of the alumni relations

director in university advancement. The mission of the Office of University Advancement is,

"The Division of University Advancement is vested with the responsibility of raising

philanthropic support, promoting visibility and credibility, and cultivating friends to help ensure

the fiscal sustainability of Georgia Southern University" (Georgia Southern University, 2020b,

alumni association information section). The Office of University Advancement reports to the

vice president for university advancement and further to the president of the university. Augusta

University and Georgia Southern University have similar organizational structures in the office

of advancement, which includes an executive director and an alumni director.

Participant Selection

Determining the optimal sample size for a study leads to valid conclusions. This is a

critical step as using too many participants could be costly and exposes more subjects. However,

if there are not enough participants the results could be inconclusive. Scholarly research on an

adequate sample size for qualitative research continues to be a source of inquiry. Further, Guest et al. (2006) suggested little headway has been made to provide explanation on how saturation might be determined or guidelines for estimating sample sizes for interviews; however, they posited that data saturation had, for the most part, occurred by the time they had analyzed 12 interviews. Creswell (1998) recommended between five and 25 interviews for a phenomenological study and between 20 and 30 for a grounded theory study.

To identify participants, I developed criteria to include alumni board members and additional participants who serve as institutional employees working with alumni boards. I sought multiple participants to provide multiple sources of data to help answer the research questions (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). Using multiple sources, coupled with multiple data collection methods, helped me to triangulate the study to provide more comprehensive themes.

The initial personal contact was an email to the alumni director to explain the study, length, requirements, anonymity, and time requirements allowing me to establish empathy with the individuals in the study (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004). See Appendix B for the letter sent to participants. By establishing empathy, it allowed me to understand the experiences and attitudes of the participants being observed and interviewed. I used purposeful sampling by collaborating with the gatekeep, the alumni director, to identify current and past board members and previous alumni directors. Interview participants were geographically diverse, half male and female, one third were people of color, and had varying academic backgrounds. I interviewed a set of respondents that were most directly involved and related to alumni board roles and responsibilities to get participants from differing backgrounds as a way to triangulate. This study made use of a purposeful sampling, specifically snowball sampling, by asking after each interview for suggested others to interview (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Ultimately, I interviewed six former board members, six current alumni board members, one

current alumni director, two previous alumni directors, and two university administrators. After

completing interviews, once the respondents offered similar perspectives and no new trends

emerged, it was at this point the study reached saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Merriam & Tisdell,

2015).

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

Data collection in a case study involves building a comprehensive picture of the case. I

employed three data collection methods for this study: (a) interviews with board members and

alumni directors, (b) observations of planning and board meetings, and (c) a review of board

documents and websites. The three data collection methods allowed me to examine various

sources of data to ensure triangulation and observe coherent justification of themes. A deeper

explanation is offered for each method.

Interviews

An *interview* is the process in which the researcher and participant engage in a

conversation related to the topic of research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Maccoby (1954) defined

an interview as "a face-to-face verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts

to elicit information or expressions of opinions or believes from another person or persons" (p.

499). This study used a semistructured interview with open-ended questions. The interviews had

guiding questions; however, the responses allowed me make adjustments as I responded to the

situation, the worldview of the respondent, and concepts as they emerged (Merriam & Tisdell,

2015). I did not have a predetermined order of questions, but rather listened to what the

respondent said to understand and evaluate the details and depth of the answers (Seidman, 2013).

I sought rich, thick descriptions by respecting the participant, yet probing to ask more difficult

questions as they arose (Guest et al., 2006). See Appendix C for the questions asked of the participants.

I conducted interviews with board members and alumni directors online via Zoom. At the time of this research, the COVID-19 global pandemic was ongoing. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern in January 2020 and a pandemic in March 2020 (Centers for Disease Control, 2020). The Centers for Disease Control (2020) recommended implementing policies and practices for social distancing. Therefore, to observe social distancing protocols, Zoom was used to conduct interviews for this research. The Zoom interviews I conducted were videotaped, and the audio was transcribed. I used Zoom to transcribe the interviews and edited the transcripts for accuracy. Each interview lasted no longer than 60 minutes, and during the interview, I used active listening and took notes to be able to return to key areas of interest. When participants discussed key areas of interest, I probed deeper to get meaningful answers (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Seidman, 2013).

Careful attention was paid to the design of the interview protocol beginning with an opening question that enabled rapport building with participants. The content of questions was categorized into descriptive elements: (a) board typology (e.g., structure, staff, size, scope), (b) board member experiences, and (c) board member resources. Finally, I asked for participants' questions, assured the participant of confidentiality, and established a date to reach out for follow-up questions. See Appendix D for the consent forms that were given to participants. As suggested by scholarly research, when I began to see similar patterns in the responses from participants and the interviews yielded no new information, the interviews concluded (DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I took field notes during interviews to document

the surroundings, my thoughts, and follow-up questions. Each interview was then loaded into MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program, upon completion.

Observations

Observation is a systematic noting of events, behaviors, interactions, and artifacts in a social setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Observations of alumni board meetings and campus provided information to further explore during the interview process. I used observations to offer an opportunity to contextualize meaning in this case study—particularly in conjunction with other data sources. Observation data included: (a) campus visits, (b) alumni board meetings, and (c) alumni association visits. I observed the alumni association staff interact with alumni, faculty, students, visitors, and one another during a busy afternoon. I passively observed the interactions from a distance without participating in the group activities. Later, I verbally dictated notes of the process and observation. The purpose of nonparticipant observations in this setting was to give a detached and unbiased view about the group, create willingness of the respondents to disclose information to an unknown observer, and create a more discerning analysis for the researcher (Hammersley, 2007). In nonparticipant observation, I did not have prior knowledge of certain events or activities; therefore, I was only there to observe the interactions, behaviors, and setting, not to ask clarifying questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Hence, as the researcher, I simply documented what was observed.

Observing the alumni board and the planning meetings that surround the board work were an important source of information in this case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Before I began interviewing participants, I visited campus two times and observed planning meetings for the alumni board. The alumni director and alumni staff discussed the agenda, dates, location, and member obligations for the upcoming board meeting. By observing the alumni staff, I observed

activities firsthand that I would have never gained from interviews alone. I observed language, culture, and staff interactions in relations to the board. This observation helped to me to understand the participants that would be studied and the relationship to the alumni board.

Campus Visit

In order to notice things that might be routine to participants, which could lead to understanding the context of the case, I participated in a campus tour of Georgia Southern University, Statesboro campus that was offered to potential students. In so doing, I was able to instantly tap into the campus culture and see firsthand the experience and interpret the knowledge and occurrence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I intentionally decided to participate in a tour that included potential students and parents to hear the impressions of the student representatives as they discussed the pros and cons of campus life. During this campus visit, I choose not to ask any questions, but rather remained an observer of the tour and campus climate.

Additionally, I went on another campus tour with an alumni association representative in order to take advantage of their extensive knowledge of the culture on campus. The tour included and explanation and discussion of traditions like the sweetheart circle, football chants, and symbolic references on campus. Further, both tours provided information on campus buildings and historic points of interest. The campus visits were useful in providing specific behaviors and circumstances that were helpful later in the participant interviews.

Documents

Document analysis was drawn upon to understand the history, site selection, program, population, or other particulars to offer value in the process of triangulating or otherwise validating qualitative research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I reviewed the University System of Georgia (USG) consolidation planning website, board notes, formal policies, job

descriptions, bylaws, websites, campus maps, newspaper articles, alumni publications, campus

publications, and additional documents. I also examined the mission and strategic plan for the

external affairs division of Georgia Southern University. To understand the broader mission of

the institution, I looked at university mission, vision, and value statements and reviewed the

university strategic plan. The analysis of documents was helpful in understanding the group

dynamics, values, beliefs, board and campus culture, and history for the case. See Appendix E

for a selected list of documents included in my analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is fundamental in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I decided

to conduct data analysis in conjunction with data collection to engage in a dynamic process of

field work (Miles et al., 2014). As I moved through the data collection process with the board, I

was mindful to look for patterns or repeated themes to ultimately decide which categories are

well described by participants in the data and related to resource dependence theory (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). I then proceeded to data analysis to build credible data others could rely on and

trust (Miles et al., 2014). Further, richly analyzing collected data helped to go beyond initial

concepts, according to Miles et al. (2014), and to generate new understandings of data and

phenomenon.

The intent of the research was to offer an in-depth reflection on the meaning of the data

using coding to offer higher-level thinking regarding conducting research relevant to alumni

boards (Miles et al., 2014). I conducted research through interviews and analysis

simultaneously to have an active interpretation of the data. Simultaneously interviewing and

interpreting the data allowed me to make adjustments and refine interview protocols. Data

included: (a) interview transcripts from interviews, (b) board documents, (c) Georgia Southern

University websites, and (d) board meeting observations. Documents and websites were analyzed by reading for a better understanding of the institution, board, and culture prior to interviews. To analyze interview transcripts, documents, and memos, I read and looked for potential categories of roles, duties, training, recruitment, and available resources aided by MaxQDA. Using MaxQDA, I used a deductive approach to discover patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

After I edited the transcripts, I used first cycle coding to summarize initial data chunks. I reviewed the data and deductively coded areas of interest into smaller categories under each group. I then used foundational in vivo coding and descriptive coding. By using in vivo coding, I was able to collect passages through single words or phrases extracted from the interview. This allowed me to explore the members' experiences serving on an alumni board, which the researcher viewed as a microculture of the university. Further, in vivo coding allowed me to code data based on the board member or alumni directors words and spoken language and not my interpretation. I used descriptive coding as well due to the variety of documents, websites, and materials to examine. I read through the materials and coded passages according to topics. The goal was not to derive further meaning from the data, but rather to create a categorized inventory of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Next, the second cycle coding established categories and themes that allowed me to establish a more meaningful analysis. Based on the work of Miles et al. (2014), I used the recommended four functions of pattern coding: (a) reduce large amounts of data from board members and alumni directors into smaller categories, (b) analyze data during interviews to determine how to adjust fieldwork, (c) create a deeper understanding on board interactions, and (d) allow cross-case analysis for the research at Georgia Southern University.

Trustworthiness

  Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Researchers establish protocols to ensure a study is considered legitimate by others and worth consideration by colleagues. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined specific criteria to ensure these standards are met. This study used: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability as criteria through interviews, documents, and meeting observations of board members. *Credibility* is confidence in the truth of the study, which involves prolonged engagement including: (a) persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer briefing, (d) member checks, (e) referential adequacy, and (f) negative case analysis. Through the repetitious gathering of data, I was able to gain a critical view of what participants are saying, especially if the description was critical to the board member as a resource (Stake, 2006). *Transferability* is the extent to which findings are useful to others in another context requiring thick description by the researcher. As a qualitative researcher, I enhanced transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to my research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). *Dependability* is the stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study using overlapping methods and dependability audits. I took notes to account for the ever-changing context in which my research occured. Further, I described any changes that occurred in the setting and how these changes affected the way I approached the study. *Confirmability* is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which respondents shape the findings of the study, not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I ensured confirmability by allowing participants the opportunity to review interview transcripts. I also created member checks by reconnecting with participants to ask any follow-up questions or to clarify responses.

I kept recordings and detailed field notes to avoid the self-serving nature of an interview by controlling questions and responses (Kvale, 2006). Additionally, to protect the participants, I adhered to appropriate standards established by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia. Further, I limited access of documents to only those involved with this study, and participants were granted the right to withdraw at any time. I will securely store all research documents for 5 years after the initial research has been concluded.

Positionality Statement

I have worked in higher education focusing on alumni relations and external affairs for 20 years. During my time at a flagship research university in the Southeast, my interactions with those who support and offer council to the institution created an interest for me to seek further knowledge in the experiences of individuals who serve on college and university boards. My previous experience working with both alumni and boards in a university setting were the influences that led me to explore the relationships formed between universities and stakeholders, with a focus on the resources they can provide. I entered this work with a preference toward qualitative research as the foundation for my inquiry.

I believe the understanding of cultures, social settings, and relationships with other people is consistent with interpretivism. According to Willis (1995), interpretivists are antifoundationalists, who believe there is no single correct route or method to knowledge. Walsham (1993) suggested in the interpretive tradition there are no correct or incorrect theories. Instead, the theories are judged according to how interesting they are to the researcher and those involved in the same areas.

Given my current experience in community relations working with boards, I assumed alumni were asked to serve on alumni boards; yet, they were not aware of the scope of the

positions and the duties required. I did research on boards for more than 20 years. I started

working with boards that focused on discipline specific alumni boards then branched to larger

advisory boards. Repeatedly, I saw how training, communication, and interactions shaped the

experiences of the board members, but I did not documented them. Thus, I had many ideas about

these experiences but at the time of this writing they were intuitive assumptions and rather

uninformed. Through the research, I began to establish my assumptions on best practices for

alumni boards and alumni directors on their roles and responsibilities. Using my previous

experience allowed me to be cognizant of inconsequential details that can be helpful in future

research to administration, alumni associations, board members, and alumni directors.

I had the advantage of working with many alumni associations during my time as a 20-

year employee at the University of Georgia. I had gotten to know many key actors on campuses

and because of our relationships they trusted me. However, this level of access was both

advantageous, yet, could have had the potential to be harmful. There was the potential that

influences could taint the research by the participants not sharing the entire story, over sharing,

discussing poor employee performance, or not sharing all angles of an issue. Establishing the

validity of my research and the integrity of my approach, I took measures addressed previously

in my methodology to safeguard against bias.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings described in this chapter are a result of research collected using a qualitative

methodology by conducting semistructured interviews with crucial individuals. I developed this

case study based on interviews with current and former alumni directors, board members, and

senior administrative leaders. The case study also included a review of websites and documents

provided by the alumni association from Georgia Southern University. Ultimately, I formulated

the findings from the documents and interviews to examine the roles and responsibilities of

alumni boards. As such, the first section of this chapter outlines insights derived from examining

the structure of the alumni boards of Armstrong State University, preconsolidation Georgia

Southern University, and post consolidation Georgia Southern University, which were vital in

contextually framing this study. These insights provide a structural context in defining the

framework of the alumni board. The next section includes a thematic discussion of the

experiences of alumni directors and alumni board members. This chapter presents the thematic

findings in three sections: (a) the Campus Mayor, (b) the Town Crier, and (c) Getting Found.

Golden Eagle Structural Framework and Findings

The University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents approved resolutions making

the consolidation of Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University official as of

January 1, 2018, and 3 years later, the ripple effects were still felt on campus grounds. The

consolidated Georgia Southern University's aim was to better serve students, broaden and

redesign academic programs offered in the region, and reinvest savings into academics to

improve student success, according to the USG (Georgia Southern University, 2018). Strategically allying two institutions to better support their surrounding communities by purposefully aligning degree offerings with institutional talents and regional needs was the recipe the USG and the consolidation implementation committee hoped would lead to success. The result was campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, and Hinesville all went under the Georgia Southern University umbrella.

As I entered an expansive room with a wall of windows looking out over the azaleas and roses, the beams of mid-morning sunshine flooded the stately boardroom brimming with hues of navy and gold. Under the backdrop of the distinct golden eagle, this boardroom is where the intricacies of size, duties, scope, and the structure of the board are determined. In the following pages, I share the structure that makes up the current Georgia Southern University Alumni Board. To gain perspective on the transitions, changes, and modifications that have occurred, a description of the preconsolidation Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University boards are discussed as well. In describing the configuration and scope of work required of the boards, it was my aim to provide a framework that underpins the findings of this research.

The structure, responsibilities, and powers given to the Georgia Southern University Alumni Board extend far beyond the golden eagle pin given to incoming board members; they are determined by the constitution and bylaws of the alumni association. The alumni association serves the university by establishing lifelong relationships with alumni and friends, which result in alumni participating in and contributing toward the continued growth of Georgia Southern University. Anyone who attended Georgia Southern University or Armstrong State University, or any predecessor institution and is not a current undergraduate is a member of the alumni

association and eligible to serve on the alumni board. Like most lay boards, the alumni board serves in an advisory capacity and, therefore, does not have the power to establish governance.

Georgia Southern University Preconsolidation Board

To better understand the current alumni board at Georgia Southern University acknowledgment of the traditions and structure of the preconsolidation board are described in the following section. The campus community of Georgia Southern University did not see a change to their beloved mascot GUS, nor any variation to the stately blue and gold university colors; however, the alumni board was modified. Before consolidation, the alumni board was made up of a maximum of 36 alumni and was housed at the Statesboro, Georgia campus. Officers of the Georgia Southern University Alumni Association included (a) a president, (b) a president-elect, (c) a secretary, (d) a treasurer, and (e) the executive director. Interestingly, the large executive committee consisted of (a) the president, (b) president-elect, (c) the immediate past president of the alumni association, (d) secretary, (e) treasurer, (f) executive director, (g) associate director of alumni relations, (h) chairperson of the Georgia Southern University Foundation, Inc., and (i) the chairperson of the Georgia Southern University Athletic Foundation.

To offer a historical perspective, a Georgia Southern University alumni director shared that the alumni association was born out of a partnership between the alumni association and the athletic association. Further noting, prior to consolidation, close ties remained between the two entities. Additional committees included nominating, by-laws, scholarship, awards, and ad hoc. While alumni directors did have an expectation that alumni board members would support the university through giving, the by-laws stated no financial obligation. Finally, board members were identified primarily by the alumni director based on a network of personal connections with alumni.

Armstrong State University Preconsolidation Board

Although the alumni were loosely connected to the pirate mascot, the Armstrong State University alumni board was established to uphold the traditions and to keep the alumni connected. The Armstrong State University Alumni Association by-laws adopted in 2013 outlined 25 directors or board members and four officers. Further, the by-laws stated that the elected officers, which formed the executive committee, included (a) the president, (b) president elect, (c) vice president-parliamentarian, and (d) secretary-historian (Armstrong State University alumni association by-laws, 2013). As reflected in the by-laws there was a strong focus on committee work, which was supported by the five alumni councils charged with planning, promoting, and implementing programming for strategic demographic groups. Those groups included students, recent graduates, alumni ages 41 to retirement, retired alumni, and alumni that live over 100 miles from the main campus. Additionally, the board had committees that included the executive committee, nominating committee, awards committee, and affinity networks committee. And finally, outlined in the by-laws was that active board members were asked to contribute $35 to the Armstrong State University Foundation designated to any fund.

"One Georgia Southern" Board Structure Post Consolidation

After consolidation, the Georgia Southern University Alumni Association adopted new bylaws (Georgia Southern University By-laws, 2021) to establish a united "one Georgia Southern" board. The updated document, approved on March 2021, indicated the purpose of the alumni board is to: (a) operate exclusively for educational or cultural purposes in such manner as Georgia Southern University may deem best; (b) support the activities of Georgia Southern University toward realizing its educational program goals in any manner possible; (c) establish and promote goals which tend to strengthen the ties between Georgia Southern University

Alumni Association, its members, the surrounding community, and Georgia Southern University; (d) unite for social purposes those persons who are interested in the distinguished record and future progress of Georgia Southern University; (e) disseminate information regarding the educational advantages of Georgia Southern University; and (f) uphold the traditions and policies of Georgia Southern University by directing worthy students to Georgia Southern University and by such other means as may be in the power of Georgia Southern University Alumni Association (Georgia Southern University By-laws, 2021).

The consolidated alumni board elects officers, including vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Nonelected officers are the president and Georgia Southern University Alumni Association Executive Director. To support the mission of the board, committees of the alumni board were formed to include: (a) executive committee, (b) nominating committee, (c) scholarship committee, (d) awards committee, (e) governance committee, and (f) ad hoc committees. As the consolidation became a reality, a change was made to have a minimum of 24 members and a maximum of 37 members (Georgia Southern University By-laws, 2021). And the board members are asked to serve a 3-year term; however, members may not serve more than two consecutive terms. Participants perceived increasing terms would allow the board to reach long term goals. Which supports previous literature by Finch (2017) and Worth (2014) on creating stable boards. Additionally, board members are now asked to give a minimum of $1,200 annually to the Georgia Southern University Foundation and to complete 20 hours of volunteer service. Many board members felt this was fair and customary to their experiences on other boards. Board members are primarily identified through the alumni director's network and additional sources. The board meets three times a year and board members are asked to attend two of the three meetings. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, most of the meetings in 2020

and 2021 were held via Zoom. The perception of participants is the Zoom meetings were helpful for those who travel, but created difficulty in really getting to know other board members.

Pirates and Eagles - Boards Merge

The analysis of the structure of the alumni board after campus consolidation supports earlier work by Worth (2014) by providing evidence of the importance of a connected group of alumni with a safe space to discuss ideas. The structure of the new Georgia Southern University Alumni Board participants expressed as a key concern for alumni directors and the framework was debated at what interview participants called the "Macon Meeting." This meeting was pivotal in determining the fabrication of the board and consisted of the leadership from both Armstrong State University's alumni board, Georgia Southern University's Alumni Board, and the alumni directors from each institution. The meeting was held during the consolidation process on neutral ground in Macon, Georgia. All involved participants perceived the Macon Meeting produced a positive outcome on the future construction of the board. A participant at the meeting said, "we all collectively agreed on that, and then we could come committed in that meeting to going back to our respective groups and saying this is what we've hammered out and we need your support, you know at the board level and so, it worked out"

The Macon Meeting participants crafted a bridge plan that established the board would have a 50–50 composition of members from Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University. And it was also determined that after the current alumni board president—a Georgia Southern University alumni—completed their term, the next president would be from Armstrong State University. Currently, the board still maintains percentages of both institutions. Interviewees noted tension about the equity between alumni from Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University. An alumni board leader found it difficult to represent both

campuses appropriately, while at the same time, being held fast to a hard 50–50 split.

Additionally, a perceived difficulty from staff and board members in recruiting and securing

former Armstrong State University alumni interested in serving on the alumni board was noted.

This difficulty aligned with the work done by Azziz et al. (2019) regarding the 20–60–20 rule.

Although 20% of the alumni immediately embraced the changes, 60% sat on the fence to watch,

and 20% were unwaveringly opposed. Based on the literature review, lack of representation and

engagement of Armstrong State University alumni could impact accessibility to the resources the

alumni association and Georgia Southern University need to meet the goals and mission of the

institution in the Savannah area.

Selection Process and Recruitment

Interviews with Georgia Southern University board members and professional staff

indicated the recruitment process was a year-round effort. Selecting and recruiting new members

post consolidation was an amalgamation including suggestions from the board members, and

alumni staff identifying highly engaged alumni. Before consolidation, Armstrong State

University used a volunteer alumni program to aid in the identification of potential board

members. Board members indicated this program did not transfer post consolidation but thought

the idea could be advantageous. Although the participants expressed little knowledge of the

selection process, they took the opportunity to share the attributes they felt a potential board

member should possess. Alumni board members at Georgia Southern University placed a high

emphasis on diversity and the commitment to give back to the institution. Individuals with

specific skills sets were not as important to alumni board members.

Board Size

The post consolidation alumni board at Georgia Southern University fell in line with then current trends of decreasing the overall board size (McCambridge, 2017). Before the consolidation, both boards had around the same number of seats. The decision was made during consolidation planning to keep the board about the same size with no more than 36 seats, but the alumni directors perceived 30 to be a workable number of members. Additionally, the board was slowly creating a stronger focus on best practices in board governance centered on the quality of board members rather than the quantity (Price, 2018). The notion of having a quality attuned board was evident when a former Armstrong State University board member conveyed:

> We wanted engaged members. There was a lot of discussion about what is the right number, and so we came up with some language that would actually allow us to scale up the total number on the board seats. And still maintain some relative percentage is that we're amenable to our current existence.

To accommodate for the combined board, alumni directors at each institution identified members with expiring terms to open spots and eliminated those seats. Around half of the Armstrong State University alumni decided they were not happy with the changes and, as with any shift in culture, participants perceived the resistance to campus consolidation is why those board members stepped down from the board. This theme was supported by Pfeffer's (1972) finding, "board size and composition are not random or independent factors, but are, rather rational organizational responses to the conditions of the external environment" (p. 226). The board size and resignations of members indicated a direct correlation to changes in the institution.

Staffing

The professional staff members of the alumni association were highly impacted by the campus consolidation. Prior to consolidation there were two alumni directors and similar levels in their respective careers and several support staff in each alumni association. The positions and titles were impacted during the consolidation and there was an overall reduction in staff. Coping with consolidation, changes in culture, and the implications on professional development, one participant, a Georgia Southern University alumnus, passionately revealed:

Every single member of the alumni staff had a title demotion, due to the consolidation. Directors were demoted to program coordinators, so I mean, as far as I know no one lost any money we all lost titles. They went from being senior director at a smaller school, resume wise, to associate director at a bigger school. People who went from being assistant director to program coordinator at the same school. Does not look so good on their resumes.

These comments by those interviewed revealed the relevance of the alumni staff and the relationships they have with members impacts the board.

Professional alumni staff at Georgia Southern University largely impacted the work of the board. Participants said decisions made by the board were strongly influenced by the work, guidance, and research by the alumni director and professional staff. Interviewed participants saw professional alumni staff as advisors and implementers. Additionally, professional alumni staff felt they were supported by the board in introducing recommendations and new ideas including new board member training, alumni engagement events, and chapters with specific focuses on women and the military.

However, previous research on boards by Kezar (2006), found staff often provided too much or inaccurate information to board members. There was no evidence to support that staff members provided too much or inaccurate data during the interviews. Board members found staff provided needed information. According to the current and past alumni board president:

They are passionate, passionate group. Knowledgeable easy group to work with, I mean made my job being, you know, alumni president very easy. They always had stuff just ready to go things were pretty seamless. And you know that that all worked really well to me it spoke to the professionalism that the staff had.

Thematic Findings

In the previous section, I described the structure of the alumni board. Although the size, scope of work, and structure of the board are critical, exploring the acumen of experiences described by board members is pivotal in detailing board roles and responsibilities. In the following section, I examine alumni board member and alumni director perceptions of their experiences in serving on a board in a consolidated institution to answer the outlined research questions. As the alumni board members described their experiences on the board the following three themes emerged: (a) the Campus Mayor (b) the Town Crier, and (c) Getting Found. These themes uncovered a scope of discernments related alumni board obligations and are correlated to the themes of roles and responsibilities identified in the literature and discussed in Chapter 2. In the following sections, the emerging themes discovered during the research are discussed.

"The Campus Mayor": Leadership Matters

The liaison between the alumni board and the college was identified by participants as an integral role of the alumni director. The participants also identified another role also required in keeping the board informed about what the staff and volunteers are doing and to provide updates

on campus priorities. One alumni director jokingly referred to herself as "the Campus Mayor," sharing she was responsible for sharing the mission of the university, but also keeping the alumni in the streets happy and engaged. When alumni directors were asked to describe their responsibilities, they mentioned: "updating bylaws," "shifting from dues to nondues," "supporting committees," "managing expectations," "finding engaged alumni," "creating busy work," and "recruiting year-round." These comments supported the gravity of the role the alumni director plays to alumni board and the members.

The consolidation of Georgia Southern University occurred in January 2018. In previous sections, I covered the institutional and alumni board practices that occurred before and during the campus consolidation. Prior to consolidation there were alumni directors at Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University. The first theme extends some of what I reported in the structural findings. Nearly all participants interviewed noted the significance of having one alumni director. A formal search was conducted and both alumni directors applied. The position was awarded to the former Georgia Southern University alumni director, and later in December 2019 he retired. There was an interim director who was permanently appointed to the position July 2020. The change in leadership supported previous structural findings in my research that alumni staff programs are correlated to the roles and responsibilities expected of board members. In the following section, I draw parallels to support the correlation of leadership and board roles and responsibilities.

The expectations of the alumni board members were a common topic in my interviews with alumni directors and alumni board members. Under the leadership of the first alumni director, board members expressed the board was focused on engagement, connection, and being a community ambassador. One board member described serving on the board:

I think it was less of a functional driving type of board and more representative of how

you know we were using this board as a structure to disseminate information versus an

active board of driving policy or anything like that.

The alumni director at Georgia Southern University before consolidation was an

alumnus, with almost 30 years of service at Georgia Southern University. He shared that he only

sought out alumni with whom he was familiar, were entrenched in their communities, and

needed little guidance to serve on the board. Stating, he looked for "alumni doing work in their

community, and by the fact you are doing that I want to put you on the board." Board members

mentioned that their connection to this particular director was meaningful. In fact, the discussion

with one board member evoked emotion and being asked to serve was a true turning point and

gave the board member value and self-worth.

The current Georgia Southern University alumni director appointed in 2020 had a varied

background including enrollment management and development. She had 10 years previously at

Georgia Southern University and was also an alumna. During our interview, the alumni director

expressed having expectations of the board that fell in four areas: (a) communication, (b)

philanthropy, (c) events or engagement, and (d) student engagement. Those interviewed who

joined the board under this director felt the current board runs very seamlessly, and meetings

were not scripted, but were very well structured. The alumni director indicated alumni board

members are needed as mentors, supporters, and to share information back to alumni. One

participant said the board now is, "basically a post consolidation PR team to share good news

with the communities and the alumni director is behind that message."

The alumni director from Armstrong State University was a veteran in public higher

education with a strong communications and fundraising background. The position was slightly

different as the alumni director had responsibilities for fundraising in addition to alumni relations. When asked about the scope of work required in the position the alumni director clearly articulated:

> I redid the bylaws, which had been updated only a year and a half before but, they were written as if the board had fiduciary responsibilities. This was a lot of headaches in getting them to understand that their role was different than they had been led to believe by the previous administration. Not fun.

Board members felt this alumni director was highly skilled and organized with all outreach and board meetings. Based on my interviews with this alumni director there was success in creating and getting buy-in from the board on new by-laws although those did change post consolidation. The ability to advise and implement drastically different by-laws supported the relevance of the influence the alumni director has on the board.

Besides the obvious need to work together, the relationship between the alumni director and the board sets an important precedent. Every board member interviewed felt the alumni director had a key role in the leadership and direction of the board. The relationship of the alumni director and board members was perceived by participants as influencing both the board members and Georgia Southern University professional staff, which represented a powerful leadership team. Further, many of the board members developed close relationships with alumni directors which they described as: "one of my favorite people," "the best thing since sliced bread," and "true mentor." The comments revealed the relevance and influence the alumni director has on the board.

The study revealed participants believed they should be better trained about the expectations and parameters of the position and to the roles that are not the responsibility of the

board member. Worth (2008) indicated boards are often confused on their expected roles and those roles often overlap with the responsibilities of the alumni director. One of the board members shared it was important the entire board was keenly aware of the roles of the alumni director and board member as they are vastly different:

> We can't be the alumni board and the alumni director. When you maintain your lane, you know if everyone feels their gap, their responsibility, and knows their assignment and does what needs to be done, then we will accomplish a lot.

This comment revealed the relevance of the board members removing themselves from the day-to-day operations and organizational politics and ensuring the work the board continually aligned with the university's mission, direction, and priorities. In contrast, the alumni directors' interviews showed a focus on managing the daily operations, leading the association, and motivating staff.

One participant noted the alumni director worked for the university, and not for the alumni, so alumni relations is about moving the institution forward. An alumni director said, "we work with the alumni, and we serve the alumni, but only insofar as it also serves the university." The alumni directors were unified in the idea of having a good working relationship with the board and board president was like having an "ally in the trenches."

"The Town Crier": Acknowledging Consolidation

The U.S. higher education footprint has recently been challenged. Responding to increased tuition rates, competition between schools, and the questioning of the actual value of a college degree, campus consolidations such as Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University are reshaping higher education. In 2011, when then Chancellor Hank Huckaby recommended the initial consolidations of USG institutions, the crux of the dilemma for many

campuses were combining campus culture and traditions, in addition to academic programs.

Nonetheless the USG (2021) provided guiding principles to steer the consolidation process and

the analysis: (a) increase opportunities to raise education attainment levels; (b) improve

accessibility, regional identity, and compatibility; (c) avoid duplication of academic programs

while optimizing access to instruction; (d) create significant potential for economies of scale and

scope; (e) enhance regional economic development; and (f) streamline administrative services

while maintaining or improving service level and quality. One participant questioned, "why I ask

you! Why would the USG in their infinite wisdom - would they consider combining two

institutions that were 60 miles apart and focused on completely different types of students?"

Another participant passionately shared, "I run all around this town shouting like the Town Crier

trying to tell everyone this new campus thing is great, Southern is great." Other participants

interviewed thought the campuses were still divided and worried allocations of state funding

could move toward making the Savannah campus the main campus as political pull is stronger in

Savannah. One current Georgia Southern University alumnus board member said, "it's caused so

much friction. We've got people in Savannah who think they are powerful and that we're

avoiding them we've got people who went to the main campus and think everything's going to

Savannah and we don't like that, and I mean it's causing a lot of friction." An Armstrong State

University alumnus said, "I know it is for the better, but we are not one university, never will

be."

Although the campus consolidation was the best solution for long-term survival,

participants indicated negative impacts for administration, faculty, staff, donors, students, and

alumni. Study participants shared the process of consolidation particularly impacted university

professional staff. Many participants perceived professional staff were reclassified into positions

representing a demotion from previous titles after the consolidation. One board member said, "I think some of these staffing positions that have been made arbitrarily are wrong." Another said, "that isn't the way it ought to be for staff. I would just like to see a little more fairness; you know if they're going to do things check major changes or things like that that at least they've asked for input for some decisions are made." Respondents believed the professional staff still suffer from low morale stemming from consolidation. Based on the literature review, the alumni director acted in an advisory capacity to the board and was an institutional expert who had a detailed focus on the institutions' mission (O'Connell, 2003). As advisors to the board, various participants remarked they were concerned low morale, and reclassification could cause professional staff to leave the institution, leaving a gap in expertise at Georgia Southern University.

On October 6, 2017, the Statesboro Herald published an article discussing the Faculty Senate at Georgia Southern University as they considered naming a committee to deal with unforeseen consequences following the consolidation with Armstrong State University (Hackle, 2017). The faculty senate cited the size of the decisions being made as an indicator that things would not go smoothly. "This consolidation process has been very accelerated," the Georgia Southern University alumni director stated. Both alumni directors interviewed indicated having 7 months to essentially put together a new university. The accelerated process caused ripples as the Georgia Southern University Faculty Senate indicated adjustments were needed after the official date of consolidation in January 2018. Additional concerns were expressed by both board members and alumni directors on the changes including: (a) lower enrollment, (b) relocation of programs, (c) reclassifications, and (d) the renaming of campuses. An alumni board members

said, "it's just concern over people getting used to this new entity and perhaps being confused during the going through the consolidation process."

Unity for the New Georgia Southern University

At times alumni board members interviewed spoke collectively with a single voice. The unified tone fostered unity among both alumni boards. One participant noted, "it was an arduous process, it involved alumni and staff from both colleges. It had to be hammered out and then it was hammered out again." The process of consolidating the alumni board included listening to both institutions and talking through the best options for a united board. Another participant noted the board, after consolidation, transitioned into an active force and focused more on engagement with the entire university community. The participant felt the process helped to solidify the board and offered useful skills on merging differing groups which he later applied to his workplace. He shared that he had "grown in patience and developed amazing endurance" as a result of the merger process. Additionally, groups dealing with adversity often overcame difficult times by sticking together, not giving up, and not losing sight of the goal (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). One participant, a Georgia Southern University alumnus, said adversity made their board stronger. The participant went on to say, "I think we are little stronger; I think people are speaking up me included. I tell them exactly what I think." Another participant offered that "to be a voice that it's not a bad thing" when asked about overcoming differences.

Additionally, during the process and Macon Meeting, both alumni directors and board presidents worked in tandem and supported each other. Participants voiced their belief alumni directors had the best interest of the board during the consolidation process. The leaders not only worked together to determine how to structure the board, but they also included the alumni board

leadership to work through ideas. One participant noted the importance of the Macon Meeting to determine board structure:

> Y'all didn't ask for this consolidation, we didn't ask for this consolidation, but yet we've got to produce a viable result by the end of today. We got there, and it was just honestly through an open exchange of ideas, and you know we respect each other views and, at the end of the day, we're able to come in hang around in agreement.

The alumni directors and board leaders were effective in establishing a unified transition plan with a structure of 50/50 representation, defined giving standards, and transition leadership representative of both institutions. Additional recommendations agreed upon by the group were to officially merge the Armstrong State University Alumni Association and the Georgia Southern University Alumni Association. One alumni director, involved in the planning process, shared the decision to merge associations was based on previous mergers in the USG. The goal of the merger was to function as one cohesive unit, maintain physical alumni operations at the Eugene M. Bishop Alumni Center on the Statesboro Campus and in Burnett Hall on the Armstrong State University Campus in Savannah.

"We Are Not All Eagles"

In April 2019, President Kyle Marrero stepped on campus to address complaints about inequalities and low morale, particularly on the Armstrong State University campus in Savannah. Some of the alumni board members shared Marrero has been actively involved in the alumni board, attending meetings, sharing vision, and asking questions. The stated goal of the current administration was to strive to bring a singular vision to a consolidated Georgia Southern University. Board members also felt although administration was interested and showed concern and engagement with the alumni board there were some alumni who "were just not amenable to

the consolidation of the campuses—we are not all eagles." Those who were not amenable to

consolidation decided to resign from the board. On respondent said:

> It's messy, there's allegiance to both sides, you know, and you have to figure out the
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> right way to bridge those allegiance. A lot of interpretation that probably shouldn't be left
>
> up to interpretation that I think they're hurt, more than anything. And then being on the
>
> board it's like you have to clean up that and it could have been avoided.

The deep-rooted traditions of the university and the community were under the

microscope during consolidations (Azziz et al., 2017). Some critical components to successful

consolidations included a compelling unifying vision, the right leadership, and sufficient

dedicated resources (Fullan, 2001). The Armstrong State University board created a legacy

committee prior to consolidation aimed at celebrating the unique attributes and individual

characteristics of the campus they wanted to maintain like colors, building names, and programs.

Research in Chapter 2 supported the need for leaders to understand culture and subculture in the

university, to have sustainability and a healthy newly blended culture or groups detach (Budd,

2019; Cate, 2019; Wawzenek, 2021).

"Getting Found": Board Contributions and Expectations

Many of the board members perceived the use of their available social capital,

connections, and opportunities could provide resources that benefited the alumni board. One

Georgia Southern University alumnus participant noted, "bringing some you know, a different

perspectives and connections to differing networks is just one advantage" to serving on this

board. Other members noted resources such as "location in Georgia," "connection to the Atlanta

market," and "understanding of higher education" as resources provided to the alumni board.

Further, alumni resources and networks are critical to advance institutional priorities.

Participants identified the personal knowledge of the alumni director as a link to potential quality members. One participant referred to the ability of the alumni director in identifying board members as "getting found and really from knowing each other." The background, identity, and capital of those who serve on alumni boards allow institutions to increase their influence by exerting power as a group and to work together toward common goals (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). An alumni board member and past president shared:

> We're either trying to fill an area of expertise or a certain geographical region that really, we feel is underrepresented. And so, in that time, sometimes as a stretch when we're actually seeking certain people out. But they're not really sure well what we're asking them to do. When I was president, I tried to make it very clear this was the intent, but it was hard.

The ability for the alumni board to acquire and maintain resources is essential to organizational survival. Neither Georgia Southern University nor Armstrong State University control all the resources needed to survive; therefore, alumni board members play crucial roles in creating resource exchanges for the consolidated institution (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003).

Alumni board success was predicated on providing innovative resources, social networking, funding, and advocacy. Serving as a bridge between the alumni base and advancement staff, alumni board members are the best ambassadors for the institution. A few of the board members have long standing careers in higher education. Collectively, they felt they brought a historical perspective on higher education, provided insight into areas on college campuses, and were skilled at creating networks to donors and encouraging stakeholder accountability (Pettit & Litten, 1999). "We are ambassadors and more importantly a resource for the institution. I think that was a big part of the importance as well. Use us. Use us," a board

member said. These comments revealed the level of relevance the board members play in being a resource for the university.

Finding the "True Blue"

The die-hard enthusiastic, or life-long supporter of Georgia Southern University, is known all over Statesboro as the "True Blue." During my campus visits, I noticed True Blue printed on a sign in the common area, it was printed on the bus driver's t-shirt and hanging in dorm windows. During my interviews, I asked what meaning did True Blue have for participants. Many Georgia Southern University alumni participants said this phrase "shows our pride and spirit in GSU." Study participants attributed identification of those who possess True Blue as the responsibility of the alumni director. To identify the True Blue, the alumni director's personal network remained a dominant channel to identify alumni to serve on the board. Participants also noted the alumni directors' network to the advancement and alumni association divisions of the university. One alumni director, a 30-year veteran, relied very heavily on a personal network for identifying members. The other alumni directors used a personal network as the main source of seeking board members, but they also mentioned listening to suggestions from board members and received input from advancement leadership. One alumni director noted, "So, selection it is again a conversation with myself, my boss. We have just kind of a list of potential board members that mull over have conversations about and ask around." The interviews with participants supported the importance of an alumni director having a strong personal network when seeking alumni board members.

One theme emerged during my interviews from many participants that was unexpected. Participants were unaware how they were chosen to serve on the board. Some were classmates of the alumni director, some were active during their time as a student, and some started as a

volunteer at alumni events; however, they were not sure why they were selected. In my interviews with participants, when asked to describe how they were selected they mentioned: "no clue," "they think I have money," "I'm not sure," and "that is a good question." Although the process was cloudy, the alumni directors were effective in locating board members who had an interest in serving on the board. Study participants perceived that the alumni directors were committed in finding alumni who had an interest and wanted to contribute through board service. One participant said, "um I think that both university alumni folks are aware of people who are alumni and who may be a good fit and may not fit." Although participants expressed their faith in the selection process, their understanding on why they were asked to serve on the alumni board were not linked.

Having a clear and smooth process for selecting board members is one piece of evidence of a board's effectiveness (Finkelstein & Mooney, 2003). The board members, nominating committee, and board director must work together to identify quality candidates. There was not strong evidence a standard practice was established or clearly communicated on the identification and selection process from participants. The lack of processes supports Nadler's (2004) finding that selecting high-quality board members is a complex and often difficult process and more than 40% of boards lack an effective process for member selection. Additionally, to accomplish the goal of recruiting effective board members, Adams et al. (2003) recommended a long-term recruitment process that vets the candidate over a period through casual interactions noting the importance of looking at the personal knowledge, skills, and experiential background of current board makeup to determine gaps that need to be filled.

Contributions to "Help Eagles Soar"

As the changes from consolidation began to unfold in Statesboro, Savannah, and Hinesville so began the laborious task to implement determined recommendations. Imperative to the post consolidation discussion were the responsibilities of board members and one high on the list was financial contributions. Previously, alumni board member gave a minimum of $35 at Armstrong State University and giving was only suggested and not enforced at Georgia Southern University. Post consolidation each member was required to contribute $1,200 annually. The new required giving resulted in about 90% of the board giving toward a scholarship fund, which "helped eagles soar" according to one alumnus. The board members indicated strong support— finding meaning in giving back and one member offered delight in being able to be a part of helping to find the next mathematician, scholar, or inventor. When asked about newly implemented giving requirements, one participant stated, "we wanted to make sure folks understand, you actually aren't buying your way onto board but you're showing and demonstrating that you're committed to it—there's some meat and substance behind it." Participants commented they were expected to give at certain levels while serving on the alumni board. They felt doing so was "just what you do to support" or a means of showing a greater commitment to the university. Upon discussing fundraising, one board member explained:

> Making a donation should not be hampering people's engagement. You know we want to build lifelong relationships and if someone wants their lifelong relationship to be with the College of Education that's great. Let me do that and don't force someone to give somewhere else.

The responsibility to fundraise for the Georgia Southern University Alumni Board was not a role they were specifically asked to play. Some alumni boards are playing an increasingly

important role in the overall advancement strategies of institutions. Although alumni board members are often curious and eager to assist with fundraising, educating them about philanthropy and including them in the process often requires a lot of time, planning, and coordination. One board member is a major fundraiser at a larger institution in the state of Georgia. The board member felt philanthropy should be a responsibility. During our interview the participant stated, if the upcoming president has not given a major gift, "you know, I just ask. And, if they don't give in a few months, I'll ask again. This is just what should happen." Several participants shared they have never been asked about their access to other resources that could be valuable for the university. One former Armstrong State University board member said, "I had connections to legislators and local politicians that could have helped but was never asked." When I asked another Armstrong State University alumni board member about their access to key resources they said, "I guess it was almost don't ask, don't tell then you don't have to do the work, but I could have shared my rolodex full of people to you know help." This type of statement showed relevance to access to other resources that might be useful to alumni boards or the institution.

Contributions Through Visibility, Credibility, and Cultivation

Many of the study participants talked about the importance of giving back to the institution. One Georgia Southern University alumnus said, "you gotta stretch in the way you give. Stretch in dollars and time. It is just what we do." When a former board member was asked about giving back, they said, "I'm blessed. I have a lot to give. I do it for Southern to be better." Participants expressed their belief that through volunteering, speaking, mentoring, and serving as a sounding board were ways to support the institution. There was a strong commitment by board members to volunteer with students. When asked how they could support Georgia Southern

University outside of a financial donation, participants said things like: (a) handing out water during move in day, (b) talking to campus groups, and (c) mentoring high school students to consider Georgia Southern University as an option for college. One participant, a Georgia Southern University alumnus, likened his contribution as a calling. He felt led to offer internships solely to Georgia Southern University students and emphasizing the importance of mentorships and internships in a student's college experience. He offered more explanation by saying:

> But again it's like I was in a position of I can do that and pay back in some small measure, you know. Some of what I've benefited from and, more importantly, and I don't want to sound preachy about this, but you know is evangelizing what I experienced. I mean I've been a very big proponent of Georgia Southern. With the academic programs, and you know, being a mentor and we take students here at the hospital all the time. Even when times are tough, you know we don't have a lot of staff here, but I'm like these are our future and boys, we are taking them, you know. So, I do everything I can like that.

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Summary

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In this chapter, I examined the roles and responsibilities central to the alumni board members at an institution that experienced a campus consolidation to answer the outlined research questions. I identified the themes that emerged from the data (a) Campus Mayor, (b) Town Crier, and (c) Getting Found. These themes included topics such as the complexity of board structure, alignment of roles with desires to serve are linked to the alumni director, consolidation struggles, and selection. A host of dynamics face alumni boards in institutions that are part of a campus consolidation. In the end, the data from this research study extends the existing body of literature. Specific findings and recommendations are highlighted in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents the conclusion of this study aimed at identify roles and

responsibilities of an alumni board at a public institution. The following research questions

guided the study:

1. How are alumni boards after a campus consolidation organized relative to structure,

   serving, staffing, scope, and size?

2. How do alumni board members characterize their roles and responsibilities and what

   is central to their priorities?

3. How do alumni directors articulate their roles and the roles of alumni board

   members? What are alumni director priorities for alumni board members?

4. To what extent are alumni boards' organizational structure and the roles and

   responsibilities of their board members related to broader campus priorities and

   resources?

The rationale for the questions was to ascertain whether alumni board members understood their

roles and responsibilities and if they were impacted by a campus consolidation.

The results of this research cover two main components. The first component

establishes expectations and structure of an alumni board that went through a campus

consolidation and the second identifies the obligations and experiences of board members. In the

following section, I discuss how the findings relate to previous research on board service and the

conceptual framework that guided this study. Then, I offer practical recommendations for

leadership, alumni directors, and board members that could be implemented to improve current practices. Finally, I identify several implications for future research related to professional development, change management, and resource allocation based on previous works on resource dependency theory.

Review of the Study

The Georgia Southern University Alumni Association board provides a means for alumni to stay connected to their alma mater and to support and advance the university's mission. Lavery (1980) acknowledged this connection when he called for a marshaling of alumni. He posited the key to engaging or marshaling alumni was through their connection to the university. The function of an alumni board and the expected roles and responsibilities of board members often change based on leadership, campus consolidations, and resources. However, my findings showed through a strong connection between the alumni staff and board, alumni are more likely to engage with the institution. Additionally, my analysis revealed a board that was experiencing growth, establishing a structure, and creating programs. The study also offers a narrative of forgotten traditions, loss of engagement, and the disinclination to accept change. The findings emerge from a group of board members and alumni directors who have an enormous amount of passion for Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University. As a qualitative researcher, it was my goal to examine a specific case with the expectation that alumni directors and campus leaders who work with alumni boards would invoke self-reflection to look for issues that could arise on their campuses. In the following section, I discuss the relevant findings from this case study.

Discussion of Key Findings

This study was initiated with the expectation the research would show distinctive roles and responsibilities of alumni board members. Additionally, the study looked to determine if board members at institutions that experienced a consolidation were impacted by the change. The interviews conducted with alumni staff and board members revealed that boards are composed of well-intentioned individuals who were looking for high levels of engagement to support the mission of Georgia Southern University. Previous research on alumni director influence by Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981), Worth's (2014) research on establishing clear roles, and the work of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978/2003) on identification of resources helped to guide this research. To create a clear roadmap of the themes that emerged, the sections below are organized by the key topics from the three themes: (a) Leadership, (b) Campus Consolidation, and (c) Board Members. The discussion of each theme includes considerations and practical applications.

Leadership

Early in the research, I found leadership provided by the alumni director began to emerge as a theme related to board members encounters and decision-making experiences. This finding supported earlier research by Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981) that found decisions made by boards were strongly influenced by the leadership of the professional staff. Further, findings indicated Georgia Southern University board members accepted the board staff as advisors. Although Kezar (2006) found that staff believed they provided real leadership in terms of suggesting innovations and recommendations, board members in my study generally thought staff served as advisors and implementers. In the same manner, I found the alumni directors were seen as institutional experts with a detailed focus based on the nature and magnitude of the

institutions' mission. This theme supports earlier work on alumni directors by O'Connell (2003).

As two universities merged to become one, the alumni associations of each respective institution began a merger process in the hopes of maintaining the integrity of both Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University alumni boards. The merging of the boards proved to be an exercise in logistics negotiations. One key conclusion from my interviews with participants was the pivotal role the position the alumni director played on the impending success, worth, engagement, and significance of the board. Thus, supporting Sabatier and Mazmanian's (1981) work regarding the influential role the alumni director plays on the board when making decisions.

The alumni director influences many aspects of the organization, including recruiting new members from their networks. The alumni director is the linchpin in the flow of work on the board. Lavery (1980) acknowledged the importance of the alumni director in previous work, finding the key to engaging, or marshaling, alumni was through the alumnus connection to faculty and staff with deep-rooted commitment to academic and ethical standards. Similar to Lavery's (1980) work, I found implementing the desires of the board and establishing the scope of work was the responsibility of the alumni director. Based on my study, the alumni staff were essential in understanding the desires of the board and responsible for putting forward and carrying out those desires. Finally, the training of the alumni board members is predicated upon the views and goals of the alumni director. As noted in my study, the specific training provided by the alumni director was evident to board members, and, upon change of alumni director, the board members noted changes in goals and training.

One might presume that an alumni association established over 88 years would have structured training procedures. However, my analysis found that board members historically did not receive initial or ongoing training as an alumni board member at Georgia Southern University. One alumni director I interviewed said there was little interest in training people, but rather he wanted board members who were connected to the community. Although there is a plan to implement training, based on previous research by Schmidt (2014), without training on roles and obligations the responsibility of a lay board is in peril as a provider of advice and expertise. Brown and Iverson (2004) noted one advantage to training is that it can provide insight into new areas of focus or expanded services for the institution. And, based off their work, if Georgia Southern University alumni board does not train or retrain the board members, it becomes vulnerable to misinterpretations on intended roles and responsibilities.

Campus Consolidation

The campus consolidation of Armstrong State University and Georgia Southern University was an alignment to maintain the livelihood of campuses, resources, productive faculty, programs, and funding (Malatesta & Smith, 2014). Based on Scott and Davis (2007), two universities often align based on an affinity in interests, students, courses, knowledge, or resources. Additionally, university alignments in public institutions can create multiple campuses, just as Georgia Southern University did with campuses in Hinesville, Savannah, and Statesboro (Azziz et al., 2019; Martin & Samels, 1994; Millet, 1976). As Seltzer (2019) noted, although mergers are a well-tested approach to rapidly securing growth, stability, and value, careful strategic planning is necessary so as to consider how various groups are affected. The data from this research supports the first guiding principle of resource dependence theory, which is that an organization needs resources to meet goals and ultimately survive (Pfeffer & Leong,

1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978/2003). As the two alumni boards merged, Georgia Southern University needed alumni support and resources to meet the goals of consolidation. The alumni needed to play a crucial role in creating exchanges because neither institution possessed the resources it needed to survive and be successful. Therefore, during the transition, the alumni board, at the Macon meeting, sought horizontal coordination through co-opting a group of elite members of both institutions to establish a relationship between the two alumni boards and determine how to consolidate (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998; Malatesta & Smith, 2014). The co-opting of the two boards brought new perspectives and needed resources, but while some were aligned with the alumni board goals, the new members did contribute to mission drift as they pushed for separate colors, mascots, and retaining the Armstrong State University name.

The findings revealed the changes associated with the merger of two university alumni boards into one alumni board was a complex and ongoing process that bled outside the alumni boardroom. Trusted board leadership and alumni directors initially mediated terms from both institutions to establish a board structure that was representative of both institutions. Creating unity was the single most important factor for the consolidated alumni board.

This finding on accepting the merger was encouraging and, yet, created concerns. Because feelings of dissatisfaction with the consolidation still permeate, difficulties exist in securing Armstrong State University alumni to join the board. The alumni board could continue to struggle to create the needed sense of unity. Moreover, as additional students graduate from Georgia Southern University those students will identify as Georgia Southern University alumni and the Armstrong State University identity may fade over time as future alumni will identify as Georgia Southern University alumni having an impact on the percentage breakdowns established at the Macon Meeting. The acceptance of the merger by alumni of both institutions supported a

study on mergers in higher education by Azziz et al. (2019), which found that 20% of stakeholders immediately embrace the changes, 60% sit on the fence to watch, and 20% will unwaveringly oppose it.

Another finding revealed the consolidation had an impact on the alumni association staff. Research on effectiveness and efficiency suggested less gains than perceived. The loss of organizational identity shifts away from core mission, decreases morale, drains personnel, and disrupts programs resources (Cortez et al., 2009; La Piana, 2010; Meier, 1980). Supporting this previous research, the transition at Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University was fraught with uncertainty in positions, reclassifications, demotions, and sensemaking in navigating the change process. Additionally, the findings revealed that board members perceived the consolidation process created trying situations for alumni staff. Initial observations in my study indicated preconsolidation Georgia Southern University alumni staff were perceived to be less impacted by the consolidation by participants. Perceptions from Armstrong State University alumni indicated that the alumni office was highly impacted by the merger and was likely to be consumed by Georgia Southern University. Finally, employees of both institutions experienced perceived demotions in positions, an impact on morale, and sought other opportunities.

Board Member Contributions and Expectations

Comments mentioned in Chapter 4 like "the Campus Mayor," "best thing since sliced bread," and "knows everyone" supported the previous studies that emphasized the importance of the alumni director as a liaison between the institution and the alumni (Budd, 2019; Cates, 2019; Worth, 2008). The Georgia Southern University alumni director is not a board member, but provided a valuable role as recruiter, negotiator, advisor, and committee member. The recruitment and selection process at Georgia Southern University involved the use of personal

networks. The alumni director used their personal network and relationships with groups or people with whom they had a connection or common interest to seek members for the alumni board. One alumni director sought individuals who were connected to their local community as boots on the ground in specific cities. Yet another alumni director sought board members through a network of those who had a positive experience as a student and were known to others on campus, which supported Worth's (2016) previous work that emphasized the importance of the student experience to alumni relations. And finally, another alumni director sought board members based on relationships from other alumni volunteer roles.

The important task of recruiting and selecting potential board members to fill only 36 board positions is an ongoing process. I did not find a comprehensive plan or formal recruiting process in use at Georgia Southern University. However, I did observe several examples of informal recruiting from alumni directors and board members as they created networks to identify potential board members. The current alumni director used board members at regional meetings to serve as the eyes and ears of the alumni association. Additionally, the alumni director used the alumni association staff to cast a wide net to identify diversity in region, degree areas, skills, and background for potential board members. The alumni director created a network of individuals with a passion for Georgia Southern University, which at the core, established a sense of trust and fostered partnership between the university and alumni. The board members felt their relationships with the alumni relations staff were important and compared it to a friendship. Given the sensitive nature of the campus consolidation, having personal relationships will continue to foster positivity on all three campuses.

Based on previous research by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978/2003), board members are recruited to board positions to provide connections to resources sought after by the institution.

Pfeffer and Salancik noted the board plays a crucial role in creating exchanges because no institution controls all the resources needed to survive. However, the findings did not appear to support this expectation. Alternatively, the findings revealed recruiting based on resources needed by the institution was not a consideration of any participant interviewed. The resource dependency theory (RDT) indicates that boards seek those with needed resources to fill the organization's needs. The findings of this research did not support that board members were identified based on resources. The findings indicated that board members were recruited based on familiarity with the alumni director. The participants used words like "wow, never thought of that," "that is a great idea," and "we don't, but we should" were common when asked during interviews.

I assumed that post consolidation Georgia Southern University would look to become financially stable and more entrepreneurial, and create unity and new economic markets. RDT, which was supported in my study, suggests organizations deprived of crucial revenues will seek resources. Georgia Southern University needs a variety of resources to be successful. Such resources include student mentors, feedback from outside the university, council for administration, and potential donors. As such, those resources ultimately originate from the environment, which includes the alumni and the alumni director. One central hypothesis in RDT says that whoever controls resources has the power over those actors who need these resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Therefore, the resources Georgia Southern University requires such as mentors, feedback, or donors could be found in the hands of the alumni of the university.

The theory of academic capitalism, of creating new networks of actors that expand boundaries for institutions into public and private sectors, surprisingly was not supported (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Financial oversight, administration, and ideologies impacts how

academic capitalism appears on each campus. As Georgia Southern University not only wrestled with the impacts of consolidation, but also dealt with diminishing public funding, it was my assumption the administration would seek others, particularly alumni, to pursue outside funding. The findings of this study, however, did not align with the core constraints of the theory of academic capitalism. The participants involved in this study found relevance in providing support through volunteering, annual giving, and networking. However, there was no evidence to support that alumni were used to provide a co-op relationship to market money. It is my opinion that alumni do not see their role on the board as an interlock to potential revenues. It is undetermined if this type of role is considered viable by current administration. Further, I offer that often academic capitalism is linked to funding research and eventually to marketability, and alumni do not perceive this as a role on the alumni board. Ultimately, alumni see their role as a resource to the university, but not necessarily as a link to unexplored areas of capital.

Recommendations for Practice

Boards in higher education are urged to become more dexterous, resourceful, and engaged in dynamic leadership. Maximizing and realizing the resources boards provide the institution is one way to understand how boards provide service to the college or university. In this section, I provide additional interpretations informed by this study of a merged alumni board to make recommendations to aid higher education leaders and alumni staff as they consider their work with alumni boards and the roles members are asked to play.

Campus Leaders

Based on the findings of my dissertation, I recommend campus leaders be mindful of traditions, history, customs, campus environment, community, and seek for congruency to gain alumni support. Building upon Azziz et al. (2019), Georgia Southern University should work

actively to engage the 20% of alumni that are committed and work to convert the 60% that are on the fence as an effective approach to engage their alumni. Further, leaders should seek to openly engage at alumni board meetings and create focus groups to garner support, create dialogue, and share plans. Moreover, institutions should seek to recruit and retain alumni directors attuned with the institutions mission, vision, and goals. Further, campus leaders should seek to include alumni directors in institutional decisions, planning, and strategic initiatives as they represent a key and valuable stakeholder group for the university.

Alumni Directors

Alumni directors are key to the success of the alumni board. As such, directors should actively seek professional development to hone leadership skills and board management and instill in colleagues the importance, value, and gravity of alumni engagement. Based on previous work by Worth (2014), as institutions grapple with any change, the hard choice lies in determining the level or viability in engaging the alumni. As such, alumni directors should look outside their personal network for board members. Possible considerations include developing a recruitment committee or reinstitute the volunteer program that held success at Armstrong State University. This volunteer committee could also be a way to engage recent graduates to determine interest in board service. Despite good intentions, the recruitment and selection process for the Georgia Southern University Alumni Board could be overlooking certain groups by relying heavily on the alumni directors' network. Previous research by Worth (2014, 2016) held that a diversified board requires multiple networks to identify potential board members. I conclude that an increased focus on recruitment based on the conceptual framework of this study could lead to a stronger board more agile to adapt and address the needs of a consolidated campus.

Board Members

Board members should look to seek ways to help support the alumni director through recruiting potential board members, identifying alumni leaders, or supporting alumni director initiatives. To continue to address the culture post consolidation leadership, alumni directors, and board members should openly and actively look for ways to encourage unity in three campuses. By actively pursuing supportive alumni, the future of the board is far more promising. At its core, the institutional culture is ingrained in the college, exposed by leadership, demonstrated by the board, and emphasized by the alumni.

Future Research

It was beyond the scope of this study to look at the impact of leadership on the alumni board outside of the selection site. Valuable information could be gained from comparing the alumni boards that have undergone campus consolidations at other institutions both public and private. Further, it would be beneficial to acknowledge programs of distinction and institutions that are more than 10 years post consolidation. Therefore, a study of comparison would be a logical area for future research and could extend the understanding of ways to collaborate, train, and better use the alumni board.

Culture is the glue that binds Georgia Southern University together. It is the ever present blue and gold, the pride in saying go eagles, and the joy for the alumni director in welcoming new graduates. College and university leaders need to understand this culture to effectively articulate who they are, what they offer, and why it matters. The intricacies and, ultimately, impact associated with a campus merger are complex. The influence a consolidation has on the alumni is positive in some instances; however, in others there remains deep seated discontent. According to previous work by Cates (2019), Drezner (2011), and Worth (2016), alumni have an

important role as ambassadors, advocates, and a major source of donations. As such, alumni giving post consolidation is an area in need of attention. Based on the findings of my research, I have identified that looking at the long-term impacts on alumni giving could extend our awareness of how to engage with alumni as donors. This longitudinal research could help advancement, alumni, and university leadership determine ways to connect, seek funding, or secure valuable resources for the future.

The continued success of the Georgia Southern University alumni board is predicated upon selection and in-depth training of board members on their roles and responsibilities. Based on the findings of my study, further research is needed to address successful measures for board recruitment. As there is little information and data on board recruitment in higher education, there could be benefit in looking at nonprofit boards with similar missions. This research could support boards in higher education by extending our knowledge on recruitment and the value board members place on service.

Conclusion

The rational for this study was to recognize whether alumni board members understood their roles and responsibilities and how they were impacted by a campus consolidation. Based on my research of the Georgia Southern University Alumni Board, board members had an idea of what they expected their roles and responsibilities were, but the defining and true delineation was made by the alumni director. Additionally, the training of board members to fulfill their roles rests in the alumni director's motivation and duty to provide the knowledge.

Additionally, the study sought to determine if the Georgia Southern University alumni board was impacted by the campus consolidation. Based upon the data, the board was impacted in size, structure, and scope. However, the study revealed the board was affected largely by the

alumni director. During my study, I had the opportunity to interview three alumni directors who served as an alumni director for Georgia Southern University and Armstrong State University. The interviews exposed clear connections between the roles of the board members and the goals and reflections of the alumni director. I assumed interviewing one alumni director who experienced this transition would not have revealed the same data or provided enough data to fully understand the role of the alumni director. Yet, having the ability to compare data gathered from three alumni directors and the variations in their leadership unveiled the links between board members and alumni directors.

Overall, this study provided an exploratory view of the roles and responsibilities of alumni boards in a consolidated public institution. This study contributed to the literature on alumni relations by offering insight in the areas of alumni institutional leadership, acceptance, selection, and recruitment. Based on my findings, future research is needed focusing on exploring the critical need for asset rich alumni to serve on alumni boards. When exploring alumni boards, there is much work to be done to better use their resources. Alumni boards hold the power to gather assets, influence, capital, and traditions on behalf of the institution, and are open to developing relationships with alumni leadership. Further, alumni already have a vested interest in the institution and are often eager to be engaged.

A consolidated institution must actively try to seek, build, and maintain a culture of support for all alumni no matter the mascot or colors. If each new graduate feels the future and culture of the campus relies on them, then they are more apt to stay engaged over time. Additionally, leaders must actively seek all alumni by providing them with a voice and keeping them apprised of challenges and opportunities in the institution. Finally, before recruiting alumni board members, it is critical to establish clear roles and responsibilities and develop training for

board members to ensure the alumni association and institutional goals are met. By combining intentional practices and recognizing campus culture, alumni boards in modern higher education can serve as a solid platform that provides collective participation and empowers members to become brand ambassadors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTERS

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 17, 2021

Dear Erik Ness:

On 5/17/2021, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Roles and Responsibilities of Alumni Boards in a merged institution
Investigator:	Erik Ness
Co-Investigator:	Marti Brick
IRB ID:	PROJECT00003659
Funding:	None
Review Category:	DHHS Exempt 2ii

We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may begin 5/17/2021.

Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf). As noted in Section C.2., you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.

A progress report will be requested prior to 5/17/2026. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

GEORGIA SOUTHERN
U N I V E R S I T Y

RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Veazey Hall 3000
PO Box 8005 • STATESBORO, GA 30460
Phone: 912-478-5465
Fax: 912-478-0719
IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

To:	Marti Brick
From:	Eleanor Haynes, Director, Research Integrity
Date of letter:	June 9, 2021
Subject:	External Recruitment Request

To Whom It May Concern:

Marti Brick has requested permission to collect research data through a project titled **"Roles and Responsibilities of Alumni Boards in a merged institution."** I have been informed of the purposes of the study and the nature of the research procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. A copy of the investigators home institution IRB approval letter will be required before any recruitment of GS subjects may occur. Data collection using GS subjects must be suspended at any time your home institution IRB approval lapses or becomes invalid.

GS Tracking #: H21420

Nature of Request: Recruit from Georgia Southern alumni board members and former alumni directors for interviews.

As a representative of the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board, and with the concurrence of the Provost office, I am authorized to grant permission to allow the researcher to recruit research participants via flyers posted on campus. Permission to recruit does not obligate GS faculty or student participation nor indicate any GS endorsement of or engagement in your study. If you have any questions, please contact me at 912-478-0843.

APPENDIX B

INITIAL LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Recruitment Email or Script for Recruitment Phone Call

<div align="right">PI: Erik Ness</div>

<div align="right">Co-PI: Marti Brick</div>

Dear <insert name>,

As a doctoral student in Higher Education at the University of Georgia, I am pursuing a dissertation study about the roles and responsibilities of alumni board members. I am conducting research for my dissertation seeking to understand the resources that alumni boards provide the to the university.

I understand you have experience <in your administrative role as the alumni director working with alumni boards OR as a board member that has served on the alumni board OR in your previous administrative role as the alumni director working with alumni boards > at Georgia Southern University. To learn more about the experience of alumni boards, I am contacting you to request an hour of your time for an interview about your perceptions of the experience in specific cases and in general, factors impacting roles and responsibilities as a campus that under went a consolidation.

Your participation in a one-hour interview would be voluntary and confidential, and there are no expected risks to your involvement. When we meet, I will ask your permission to record the interview and to sign a consent form; however, you may choose not to be recorded and still participate in the study. Also at that time, I can provide additional information about my research study.

I understand that your responsibilities are quite demanding; therefore, I would especially appreciate your time and insights. If you agree to participate, please respond to this email

(xxxxx@uga.edu) or call me at XXX.XXX.XXXX to set up a place to meet (i.e. your office, a private location on campus, or a Zoom interview) at a date and time of your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Regards,
Marti Brick

Ed.D. Candidate, Institute of Higher Education
The University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602
XXX.XXX.XXXX
xxxxx@xxx.edu

APPENDIX C

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

Describe Alumni boards. After a campus consolidation, how are alumni boards organized relative to structure, serving, staffing, scope, and size?
Describe the roles and responsibilities of a consolidated campus alumni board member in Georgia?
How do alumni board members characterize their roles and responsibilities and what is central to their priorities?
How do alumni directors articulate their roles and the roles of alumni board members? What are alumni director priorities for alumni board members?
To what extent are alumni boards' organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of their board members related to broader campus priorities and resources?

Introduction
Good morning/afternoon my name is Marti Brick and I am an EdD student at the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. The purpose of this study is to look at the differing roles and responsibilities experienced by those that serve and work with alumni boards. I will collect the signed consent form, ask permission to record, and if there are any questions.

Topic: Rapport and Background:
Tell me about your experience as a student at this institution?
- Introduction to begin feeling comfortable
- Probe: what years were you here as a student?

Share with me your favorite memory of Georgia Southern
- Probe: Do you describe yourself as a loyal alumni/a? Why do you see yourself this way?

RQI: Describe Alumni boards. After a campus consolidation, how are alumni boards organized relative to structure, serving, staffing, scope, and size?
How might you describe the structure of the Armstrong State University alumni board?
- Probe: How did the structure change as a result of consolidation?

Tell me your experiences in working with staff that handle board activities?
- Probe: How do you prefer to work with the staff?

Can you give me some detail on the scope of work this board does?
- Probe: Have you experienced any particular challenges in relation to the work?
- Probe: How has the consolidation impacted the scope of Work?

What is like for you working with a board of this size?
- Probe: Do you feel the board size was impacted by the campus consolidation?

Tell me what is unique or a hallmark of this board?

RQ2: Describe the roles and responsibilities of a consolidated campus alumni board member in Georgia?

Tell me about how you became involved with this board?
- *Note this is to get the background of service and to establish if the member is from the absorbed institution or current institution.*
- Probe: What was it like serving on the board before consolidation?
- Probe: Were you involved in the consolidation process?

How would you describe your role on this board?
- Probe: Are there skills, resources, or experiences have prepared you to serve in this capacity?

Can you give me an example of the responsibilities asked of you while serving on this board?
- Probing: Were those responsibilities impacted during the consolidation?
- Probing: Have those responsibilities changed since consolidation?

RQ3: How do alumni board members characterize their roles and responsibilities and what is central to their priorities?

When joining this board, what was your central priority or reason for serving?
- Probing: Do you feel your board responsibilities help you to meet your reason for serving?

What do you think are indicators of a strong alumni board?
- Are there strong board indicators currently?
- Were there strong board indicators before consolidation?

RQ4: How do alumni directors articulate their roles and the roles of alumni board members? What are alumni director priorities for alumni board members?

Describe how you interact with board.
- Probing: What do you feel are the responsibilities of the alumni board.
- Probing: What do you feel are your responsibilities to the alumni board?
- What are challenges you face in your work with the board?
- What do you think are indicators of a strong alumni board?

What was your experience like working with the alumni board during consolidation?
- How were decision made?
- Probe: how was it decided with stakeholder's voice were most important in the decisions?

RQ5: To what extent are alumni boards' organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of their board members related to broader campus priorities and resources?

How do you identify potential board members?
- Explain the selection process
- Share with me what the training process looks like

Within the alumni board, what is the process to align with institutional priorities?

- Is there a process to identify alumni that might have resources to support those priorities?

How were priorities impacted before consolidation?
How were priorities impacted during consolidation?
How were priorities impacted after consolidation?
Is there anything you would like to add that we did not have a chance to discuss in the interview?

Thank you again for participating. Do you have any particular questions for me at this time? If you happen to think of any questions after you leave today, please do not hesitate to call or email me. Thank you!

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

**An Analysis of the Roles and Responsibilities of Alumni Boards
in Public Institutions**

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator

Erik Ness | Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia | xxxxx@xxx.edu

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to illuminate alumni boards and their engagement in higher education by looking at characteristics, roles, and responsibilities expected of board members. Further, the study examines how the dimensions of alumni board structure, selection (e.g., elected, appointed, self-perpetuating), staffing, scope, and size can provide insight into board roles and responsibilities for college administration, board members, and institutions.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- Participate in an interview, approximately one hour in length. The interview will be recorded for future analysis by the researcher.
- During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience with alumni board roles and responsibilities from the perspective of a board member or alumni director.
- If needed, follow-up clarification may be sought via email, phone or possibly an additional meeting.

Risks and Discomforts

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to refuse or withdraw will not impact your participation in any University of Georgia or Georgia Southern University programs. There are questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them. Your responses may help us understand the resource dependency effects on alumni boards in consolidated institutions and provide information to other administrators at other universities and colleges about the effects on responsibilities and resources for institutions.

We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will not name you, but instead we will assign a pseudonym for you. Following the transcription of your interview, your identifying information will be removed and replaced with the pseudonyms. We will destroy the audio recordings and maintain only the transcription with the pseudonyms. A master list with your identifying information and your pseudonym will be kept under password protection by the investigators only and will not be included in the final report. This document will be stored until analysis is complete. Georgia Southern University will be identified in the final report and any other presentations or publications.

If you agree to follow up contact via email, please note that your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Marti Brick, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now.

If you have questions later, you may contact Erik Ness at <u>eness@uga.edu</u> or Marti Brick at <u>brickm@uga.edu</u>. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, and you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

By proceeding with the interview, you are agreeing to participate in the project.

APPENDIX E

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

This represents a selection of the documents analyzed in this study.

University System of Georgia Documents
University System of Georgia. (2017). Board of regents finalizes consolidations, appoints presidents.
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