ABSTRACT

DISSETERATION: The Relationship between Academic Program Delivery Method, Alumni Demographics, and Graduate Alumni Engagement: A Correlation Study

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Limited empirical evidence exists related to the influence of online education on alumni engagement behaviors. This exploratory quantitative study examined the relationship between method of academic program delivery (i.e., face-to-face or online) and alumni institutional engagement behaviors (i.e., financial giving, volunteerism, participation in alumni events, and involvement with the institution on social media) for graduate-level alumni who completed a master’s degree program from a Midwestern four-year public doctoral research university. Further, the study investigated the relationship between alumni demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, academic program of study, and distance from campus) and alumni institutional engagement behaviors for both face-to-face and online delivery methods.

Archival data were collected from the institution related to degree program, alumni demographics, and alumni engagement behaviors and were analyzed for a correlation between the variables. The results indicate face-to-face alumni were more likely to be a donor, attend institutional events, and be involved with the institution on social media than graduates of online programs. The strength of the relationship between program delivery method and these three engagement behaviors ranged from negligible to low. There was no relationship found between
volunteerism and program delivery method. Academic program and distance from campus were correlated with the most alumni engagement behaviors and age and gender were correlated with the fewest alumni engagement behaviors.

While a difference existed between the support behaviors of face-to-face and online alumni, the strength of this relationship was not strong. Therefore, institutional advancement professionals should develop targeted strategies to engage the growing segment of graduates from online programs in order to enhance their level of support behaviors. A Relationship Model of Student Experiences and Alumni Engagement Behaviors was proposed to explain the findings of the study in relation to the conceptual framework of the study. Professional implications and recommendations for future research were provided.