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An Evaluation of Student Participation in the Student Alumni Association Program at the University of South Florida

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An Evaluation of Student Participation in the
Student Alumni Association Program at the University of South Florida

by

LaToya Wider

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
with a concentration in Educational Program Development
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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background of Study	1
Statement of Problem.....	3
Purpose.....	4
Evaluation Questions	5
Evaluation Design.....	5
Stakeholder	5
Significance of Study	6
Limitations	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Organization of Study	9
Summary	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review	10
History and Purpose of Student Alumni Associations.....	10
Student Participation and Involvement.....	13
Motivational Theories.....	17
Self-Determination Theory	19
Expectancy Value Theory.....	22
Self-Efficacy	24
Summary	26
Chapter Three: Methods	29
Methodology	30
Data Collection	30
Focus Group and Interview Methods.....	32
Participants.....	33
Participant Risks	34
Potential Benefits to Participants.....	35
Participant Consent	35
Data Analysis	35
Data Monitoring.....	36
Assumption	36
Summary	36

Chapter Four: Findings	37
Data Analysis Process	37
Themes	38
Career Readiness.....	38
Social and Spirited Engagement	39
Marketing and Advertising	41
Membership Type	42
Active Student Members.....	43
Non-Active Student Members	45
Alumni	46
Synthesis of Findings	49
Chapter Five: Summary, Recommendations, Conclusion	50
Summary	50
Marketing and Advertising	51
Career Readiness.....	53
Social and Spirited Engagement	56
Recommendations.....	58
Conclusion	61
References	64
Appendix A. Focus Group Questions SAA Members	68
Appendix B. Focus Group Questions Non-Active SAA Members	71
Appendix C. Interview Questions SAA Members.....	74
Appendix D. Interview Questions Non-Active SAA Members.....	76

List of Tables

Table 1: Focus Group Participants.....	31
Table 2: Individual Interview Participants.....	33
Table 3: Participant Demographics.....	34
Table 1A :Active SAA Member Questions	70
Table 1B: Non-Active SAA member Questions.....	73

Abstract

This paper is an evaluation of undergraduate college students' participation in the Student Alumni Association (SAA) at the University of South Florida. I evaluated benefits of participating in the program, why students do not participate in the program, and if participation affected students' persistence through college. Undergraduate students and alumni who are or once were members of the SAA participated in focus groups and interviews to evaluate their involvement in the program. Questions addressed benefits of being involved in SAA, why students do not participate in SAA, and factors that contribute to students' involvement or lack of participation in SAA. Data from the evaluation were used to identify common themes within the framework of participation and involvement to determine students' perceptions of benefits from being involved and persistence through college. Recommendations for practices are provided based on the finding from this evaluation

Chapter One

Introduction

Student motivation to be involved on campus is critical to student success in a college or university. Students need to be motivated to not only complete tasks but also excel in those tasks, which can have a significant effect on their long-term academic and career success. College student participation in extra-curricular activities directly correlates with student success, while lack of participation can have an adverse effect on the student (Astin, 1999). Through a previous research study conducted by Caruth (2018), student participation in and out of the classroom and its relationship to student persistence through college to graduation was evident. Students' engagement in extra-curricular experiences is an element of overall academic success (Caruth, 2018, p. 18).

Background of Study

The Student Alumni Association (SAA) is an organization sponsored by the Alumni Association at the University of South Florida. This organization provides current graduate and undergraduate students the opportunity to enhance their college experience through exclusive opportunities to network with alumni, attend professional development workshops, and connect with their peers. Students pay a one-time membership fee that supports the funding of activities for the alumni program. The goal of the alumni association is for these students to interact with alumni and get a better understanding of the Alumni Association so that when they graduate, they will experience a natural transition into alumni members.

Students who become members of the alumni association have accesses to alumni from various career fields through networking events and dinners, professional development workshops hosted by companies in the area, and attend school spirit events, such as watch parties for athletic events and socials. The SAA has approximately 3600 members, with the vast majority being undergraduates in their first or second year at USF.

The Student Alumni Association started in 2009 as a way to connect students to the Alumni Association before graduation so they would remain connected as alumni. The first year of SAA saw minimal growth, as students were trying to understand the concept of being a student alumni member and what that meant for them in terms of activity and programming. The pricing structure was initially an annual membership fee of \$25, but if the student purchased a four-year membership as a freshman, the student would get a year of membership for free, or \$75 for all four years. Student membership was relatively low (100) the first year and the program gained some traction, but at a slow rate.

After one year of the program, the Alumni Association decided to change the pricing structure in fall 2010 so that students paid one price for all four years and that price was reduced to \$20. The new price structure resulted in a dramatic increase in membership; it grew to just under 1000 members in two years. Upon establishing a new infinity partner with the USF Credit Union in 2013, the alumni association signed a contract allowing students who joined the credit union and opened a checking account to receive a free SAA membership paid by the USF Credit Union.

While this relationship with the USF Credit Union seemed like a great way to increase membership in the SAA, in reality the agreement created a system with over 4000 members who are relatively inactive in the different programs and activities. The Alumni Association benefited

from this agreement by have a huge increase in its student membership and having a larger audience of students to engage with without having to solicit for membership. This aspect of the agreement is a positive and saves alumni staff from having to “sell” memberships. However, the Alumni Association did not put a plan in place at the time of entering the agreement to communicate and engage with new its new members.

According to membership data provided from the USF Alumni Association (2020), the SAA has approximately 4,800 student members comprised of both undergraduate and graduate students, where 90% of those members are from the USF Credit Union and the other 10% are from students who paid the one-time membership fee. Of the 4,800 students, 75% are undergraduate students and the other 25% are graduate students. The goal of the SAA is to provide opportunities through events and activities for students to connect with alumni, cultivate relationships among each other, collaborate with other departments for events, and prepare for life after graduation.

Statement of Problem

The USF SAA lacks participation by a large proportion of its members in annual events and activities. The SAA has a large population of student members, but a very small percentage of those student members participate in the activities designed to promote their academic and career success. When looking at the dynamic of a large student membership organization with a low participation rate, several questions may be asked, including, a) Why are students not participating in the activities? b) What do SAA members perceive about the benefits of attending alumni activities?

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the participation of undergraduate students in the Student Alumni Association (SAA) at the University of South Florida (USF) and the reasons undergraduates participate in the program. The evaluation identified undergraduate students who are not active participants in the SAA and their reasons for not participating. Lastly, the evaluation examined alumni who were once involved with the Student Alumni Association to learn about their participation and any impact the program had on their persistence through college. The evaluation examined student participation in the program and student opinions related to participation and college persistence. This evaluation was conducted via individual interviews and small focus groups with students and alumni in separate groups. Students were invited to participate in one of several small focus group, based on their involvement with SAA. Participants were assigned to focus group according to previous involvement in SAA; those with prior SAA activity were in one group, and those without SAA experience were in another. Selected focus group participants were later invited to participate in individual interviews. Alumni were also asked to participate in a focus group and interviews.

This evaluation is important because it addressed the critical area of student success and factors or resources that may be associated with students' persistence in college. Retention and graduation rates are directly related to performance-based funding and rankings among colleges in Florida. There are several student success attributes in post-secondary education. Some of these includes grades, persistence to the sophomore year, length of time to degree, and graduation, but most elements within the definition of student success consider degree attainment to be the definitive measure (Kuh et al., 2006). For this evaluation, persistence and retention were the primary indicators of student success.

Student involvement is defined as students who are attentive in their learning and involved with their classes, peers and the college (Caruth, 2018). Involvement and participation in campus activities out of the classroom can enhance a student's personal and professional development and motivate students to persist through college and graduate.

Evaluation Questions

In looking at participation in the SAA and how it affects persistence in college, three evaluation questions were proposed for this study:

1. Why do college students choose to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?
2. What factors motivate college students to participate in activities with the Student Alumni Association?
3. Why do college students choose not to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design of the study is a program evaluation utilizing interviews and focus groups to compile data from current members and alumni of the SAA.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders are the staff of the USF Alumni Association who sponsor and provide funding for the program to be successful and beneficial to the university. Additional stakeholders are the student members of the SAA who benefit from the program. The University of South Florida is a stakeholder, as the SAA can assist with student persistence and retention, which are key benchmarks for the university in securing performance-based funding. In addition, the

students participating in the SAA are more likely to become involved alumni who are future contributors to the university

Significance of Study

Searches of the topic of student participation in extra-curricular activities and student motivation to participate in extra-curricular activities as it relates to self-efficacy, persistence through school and leadership within activities yielded numerous articles. When looking at motivation, particularly extrinsic motivation in middle and high school students, a study by Tyner and Petrilli (2018) indicates that, optimistically, to get students motivated intrinsically, schools would have to be very engaging and have a supportive student-teacher relationship in order for students to work hard and excel. While the study is optimistic as the best-case scenario for student success, it also states it is unrealistic in most school systems for every student. While the Tyner and Petrilli (2018) study relates to secondary education, how might these findings translate to post-secondary education and motivation for college students? When students have more freedom and autonomy in college, how is motivation affected and how does that affect student persistence? While autonomy may be more visible and student outreach more needed in college, how do programs like the Student Alumni Association increase involvement and participation among members?

Overall, there is limited studies on participation in SAA programs; however, there are some studies that support the significance and benefit of an SAA in a student's perception of college, satisfaction with student experience, and likelihood of being involved as an alum. For this study, the literature used to guide this evaluation informed different aspects of participation and motivation from a classroom learning environment and from involvement in extra-curricular activities. I also considered how participation in activities in and out of the classroom might

affect student self-efficacy. Lastly, in the literature review I discuss student retention and persistence in college as it relates to motivation and student involvement.

Limitations

There were limitations identified in this evaluation that may influence the findings. The first limitation is sample size. In this evaluation I conducted interviews and focus groups with students who have participated in the program to learn if there are benefits of participating in SAA. The evaluation also included students who have not participated in the program to understand why those students choose not to participate. Gathering enough students who have not participated in the program to volunteer for the interviews and focus groups was a perceived challenge but found to not be true. In fact, it was more challenging finding active students to participate in the evaluation than non-active students. The data from students who choose not to participate in the program provided insight as to why the decision to not participate was made and provided relevant and valuable data that can be used for enhancing future program activities.

The second limitation is self-reported data. The evaluation used interview and focus groups to collect data from students. The evaluation findings rely on students' interpretations of the activities they have participated in within the program and the perceived benefits and/or impact of these activities on students' persistence through college. Students were asked to give their personal assessment of the program through recollection of activities, which contain biases. The biases that could be most profound are selective memory, not recalling the events and activities, and attributing a negative experience to the overall assessment of the program without recalling positive experiences.

The last limitation of this evaluation is access. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the ability to interview students individually and through focus groups was challenging. Interviews

and focus groups were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams. Students did have virtual “fatigue” but most were receptive to being interviewed in this manner. In addition, it was more difficult to read body language to see if the students felt comfortable and receptive to the type of questions asked, especially if a student chose to turn off their video camera. Lastly, there was no controlled environment during the interviews and focus groups, where outside distractions for the students could have been eliminated. While access may have some challenges, prior to interviews and focus group meetings students were asked to find a quiet place during the meeting time and to have video cameras on for the duration of the meeting. Most students kept their video camera on, but there were a couple of alumni who chose to keep their camera off. Students were provided with this information at the time of requesting their assistance for the evaluation and in all reminder communications.

Definition of Terms

- Undergraduate Student - defined as any student in post-secondary education who is working towards completing his or her first bachelor’s degree.
- Student Alumni Association- program within an alumni association at a college or university that provided programming to current students to introduce them to alumni and create long term relationships with the university or college
- Alumni Association – defined as department within college or university that communicates with alumni of that college or university and provides opportunities for alumni to engage and continue to be involved through programs and/or giving
- Self-Efficacy - defined as a person’s feelings that they can successfully perform a behavior or task required to reach an outcome.
- Student Success- defined as college student’s persistence through college and retention.

- Participation/Involvement- defined as college students attending activities and/or events outside of the classroom.
- Motivation- the student motivation will be generally defined as the likelihood of a student wanting to participate or engage in activities outside the classroom.

Organization of Study

During this program evaluation, I worked closely with program stakeholders to determine the benefits of the Student Alumni Association and motivating factors for student participation through interviews and focus groups. What is of importance to the SAA is improving participation in the current activities and events with a predominately undergraduate population that became members through the partnership between the USF Alumni Association and the USF Federal Credit Union.

Summary

Chapter 1 includes information on the background, problem, purpose and significance of the study. In addition, chapter 1 provided information on the evaluation design and definitions of the terms. Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature on areas that are important to the study, such as college student participation and involvement, specifically within Student Alumni Association programs, and motivation to participate in extra-curricular of activities. Chapter 3 will discuss the proposed method for conducting the study. Results and Discussion of findings will follow.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

History and Purpose of Student Alumni Associations

Colleges and universities have existed to provide quality educational experiences and relied on external champions for advocacy, funding, and additional resources (Marshall, 2009). Alumni Associations, since their inception in the early 1800s by William and Mary College, have “been instrumental in providing another source of security to ensure the longevity of these institutions, public and private” (Marshall, 2009, p.11). Over the years many institutions have viewed alumni relations work as an extension of student activities and have created student organizations within Alumni Relations or Alumni Association departments to facilitate programs that involve both students and alumni. Alumni Associations have supported universities by providing a wide range of activities and events to engage and connect alumni back with their alma mater, which has been shown to lead alumni to give to a university. According Gaier’s (2001) study on alumni involvement and giving, six factors influence alumni to support their alma mater: (a) undergraduate experiences, such as student involvement; (b) alumni involvement with their alma mater; (c) institution tradition and prestige; (d) economic success of individual alumni; (e) emotional attachment and quality of relationships between alumni and their alma mater; (f) academic success; (g) and overall satisfaction with the student experience. College experiences essentially shaped alumni’s perceptions, opinions and relationships with their alma mater and directly correlate with the alumni’s voluntary involvement with and support of their institution (Gaier, 2001).

One way that universities and colleges have helped to encourage the educational involvement from alumni beyond graduation is through Student Alumni Associations. Gaier (2001) used a mathematical formula, based on research and practice, to express reasons for creating a student alumni association:

$$\text{Alumni Education} + \text{Student Involvement} = \text{Alumni Involvement}$$

(where voluntary financial contribution is a function of Alumni Involvement)

The main goal of alumni associations is not to raise funds for the university but to raise friends. When looking at raising friends and having alumni engaged early on after graduation, alumni associations introduce undergraduate students to the benefits and services of alumni associations by creating student alumni organizations. By establishing relationships with students before they become alumni, alumni associations are more likely to increase the possibility that young alumni will have more involvement and build stronger connections with fellow alumni (Gaier, 2001). Alumni Associations started creating and implementing student organizations within alumni associations, with many using guidelines from research of student affairs literature and models, help from other campus organizations, and advice from established alumni associations. In the case of Purdue University's student alumni association, their research about initiating this organization addressed goal attainment, student involvement, student motivation, student outcomes, recruitment, group structure, and programming (Gaier, 2001). When looking at the purpose of student organizations, group size and characteristics were considered. At some universities, student alumni groups were made up of large student members and at the other end were student alumni associations limited to a small group of student leaders. Group size and characteristics reflected the purpose of the student organization. Of the many

types of student alumni associations, they all shared the same purpose and goal: interact and educate students regarding the alumni association (Gaier, 2001).

While having a student alumni association does not require a lot of financial resources from alumni associations, it is important to note that when starting a new student organization, financing and personnel are the two main concerns. Once the student alumni association is established, one important task is to increase visibility and interaction with students. Student alumni associations started doing this by partnering with other student organizations or providing support with student activities. One of the best methods reported for getting students involved in a student alumni association is by word of mouth or advertising in popular mediums such as the student newspaper (Gaier, 2001).

Recently colleges and universities have become more aware of the advantages of orienting and integrating academic affairs, student affairs and alumni services to a common goal. Both student affairs and alumni relations are concerned with enhancing the image of the university and the experiences of those who come in contact with the university. Student and alumni affairs professionals are constantly looking for ways to engage students in mutually beneficial activities. These activities include strategies to orient and welcome new students and initiatives designed to attract and retain students at the institution. Success in these areas is important to the university's goal to maintain strong enrollments of qualified students, guarantee high levels of academic quality and achievement, and ensure successful graduates (Singer & Hugley, 2002). There are unaddressed needs of all college students, particularly with students in their last undergraduate year that present opportunities for alumni relations professionals to partner with campus offices to provide services, which has been shown to increase a student's

affinity for the institution. The root of these programs is in student organizations or classrooms, which can spark additional opportunities for alumni engagement (Volin, 2016).

Student Alumni Associations are a successful way to involve students with alumni and are generally inexpensive but are “effective in educating the student on the institution and fostering interaction with alumni” (Singer & Hughey, 2002, p.57). These student groups influence campus life positively and are future alumni leaders in training. Alumni Associations consider the following important for generating a positive perception in students regarding alumni associations: visibility, interacting and getting involved in the life of students (Gaier, 2001). Several alumni associations strongly agree that their student alumni association helps to increase current student interest, understanding of alumni associations, have a positive impact on involvement from young alumni, and ease the interactions between current students and alumni (p.15).

Student Participation and Involvement

According to Bialek and Lloyd’s (1998) study, “student involvement is viewed to increase social and political awareness, improve writing and interpersonal communication, strengthen organization skills, contribute to cognitive development, and it has been closely related to later job success” (p. 2). When aligning these benefits, student alumni associations look for opportunities to promote the concept of student involvement in the areas of alumni relations, communications, and philanthropy with the goal of students feeling empowered to strengthen all areas of education for the future (Bialek & Lloyd, 1998). Research has shown that participation in social activities increases social integration and interpersonal bonds with the institution. When looking at how students identify with their college or university, students will have positive feelings about their involvement in the organization, an expressed sentiment of loyalty

and a desire to help the organization be successful (Newbold, 2010). According to the Council for Student Advancement and Support of Education (1997, as cited in Bialek & Lloyd, 1998), there is significant evidence that shows the college experience is enhanced when students are involved in out-of-class experiences like those sponsored by members of the Student Alumni Association and/or Student Foundation Network. Student participation in events and activities are strong indicators of student satisfaction at a college and participation in programs like student alumni association can have a positive impact on student success.

In a study on student involvement, retention and motivation, Caruth (2018) discussed five measurements for predicting student satisfaction and success as it relates to student involvement and motivation. Those five measurements are: degree of course demands, depth of student faculty relationships, level of inspirational scholastic experiences, quality of a helpful atmosphere and intensity of a caring college environment. The more students are involved and feel connected to their university, the higher the level of satisfaction and academic success within the student.

Partnerships between alumni and student affairs can provide students with significant opportunities. When considering the role of the alumni associations in student life, when the target population includes both students and alumni, research indicates that the benefits of bringing the two populations together are generally very rewarding (Singer & Hughey, 2002). When looking at student's participation in and out the classroom, student success is tied to their level of involvement and more likely affects how they perceive the university and how they spent their time (p. 52).

When creating a student alumni association, student involvement factors are very important to understand. In the study conducted by Gaier (2001), which looked at increasing alumni

involvement and financial support through student alumni associations, the researcher looked at various factors associated with student involvement and found that one of the factors is satisfaction with the college experience, which is linked to college involvement. Also, Gaier (2001) found that in and out-of-classroom involvement of non-traditional students had a positive effect on their self-confidence, and those students are more likely to be satisfied with their college experience than students who do not have involvements in and out of the classroom.

Another factor in student involvement is student development. According to Williams and Winston (1985), "through their participation in organized student activities, students seem to become more aware of the educational environment and of the resources and learning opportunities available to help them meet academic demands" (p.57). Student have reported from the study by Gaier (2001) that participation in extracurricular activities enhances college students' total development. In addition, Williams and Winston (1985) state that "students who participated in organized student activities and organizations showed statistically significantly greater developmental task achievement in the areas of interdependence, educational plans, career plans, and lifestyle plans than did students who did not participate" (p. 56). Student outcomes, including academic achievement and performance, course enrollment intentions, and school dropout, are tied to student engagement. Thus, it is imperative that colleges and universities have a good understanding of activities provided that engage students (Wu & Fan, 2017).

Student groups, such as student alumni associations, take place out of the classroom; research suggests that these activities are an important part of the student's educational development. Involvement in these activities can impact current goals, understanding, concentration, attention, affect, and task difficulty (Gaier, 2001). One such study by Volin (2016) states that students who

participate in extracurricular clubs and organizations had “statistically higher levels of development in establishing and clarifying purpose, educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle management, and cultural participation” (p. 34). When looking at freshmen compared to sophomores, there is a higher level of involvement in sophomores, especially in leadership positions, which can inspire more alumni engagement (Volin, 2016). In addition, Volin (2016) found that “significant changes were reported in the frequency of engaging in leadership behaviors from freshman to senior years” (p. 34). There is a direct correlation between retention and student satisfaction among universities that connect and engage with students and consider these efforts important. Students are more likely to stay in school when they are able to form connections and are actively engaged with the campus community (Tinto, 1993).

The findings from the study by Volin (2016) support the need for more meaningful collaboration between the office of student affairs and the office of alumni relations in order to provide programs for students since expanding alumni engagement with students beyond their senior year has been proven to be beneficial (Volin, 2016). In a study by Astin (1984), student persistence increased with satisfaction for the university and was found to impact the student’s level of engagement after graduation. Furthermore, alumni who had a positive student experience were more likely to give as alum (Astin, 1984). Lastly, Astin (1984) found that extracurricular involvement can positively affect a student’s college experience.

Personal development is also part of student learning, which occurs not only in the classroom but also outside of the classroom. Such personal development activities are generally non-credit bearing, but may play a big part in the student experience at colleges and universities and are seen as life skills that employers see as valuable. In comparison to most formal experiences that take place in the classroom and are driven by learning outcomes, non-formal experiences offer

opportunities for students to gain independence and autonomy over what is learned and how it is learned (Brown et al., 2020). A student's expectancy is different in non-formal settings as their motivation to get involved in activities is driven by doing something they enjoy and find meaningful. Student societies, student organizations and committees are all examples of ways student can be involved in a non-formal setting that affects their motivation and expectancy to succeed.

Living Learning Communities are becoming more common in colleges across the United States (Kuh et al., 2004). The concept of Living Learning Communities embodies the concept of non-formal education where activities outside the classroom are facilitated by university staff, similar to a student alumni association or other student organizations that promote student growth and development in a college setting. (Kuh et al., 2004). These non-formal activities improve retention and completion rates and promote higher academic attainment. The integration of academic and social experience not only increase retention and completion rates, but also increase the students' perception of a positive experiences of college and improved employability skills (p. 53).

Motivational Theories

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), "Motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality--all aspects of activation and intention" (p. 69). Motivation is considered a significant psychological construct in the learning process and highly connected to academic achievement and persistence in college (Alt, 2015). There are several reasons for motivation and for non-motivation. Motivating factors include the value one attributes to an activity as well as strong coercive factors (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Non-motivating reasons include an urge into action by an abiding interest or bribe and a fear of being surveilled (p.69).

Motivation can be intrinsic and /or extrinsic in nature, but it all affects why you do what you do and your desire to achieve your goal. Motivated students, regardless of intrinsic or extrinsic are willing to engage and participate in the practice of learning, they make more effort even in the face of a challenge and they will do tasks without being asked (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). According Bowman (2011), it is the intrinsic rewards and not so much extrinsic incentives that motivate. While many people have intrinsic motivation, which fuels them internally for personal satisfaction, extrinsic motivation may also shape decisions. These factors may not be autonomous and are thus referred to as externally regulated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Accordingly, actions or behaviors are performed to satisfy an external demand or reward contingency. This kind of regulation is a direct contrast to intrinsic motivation, which is doing something for personal satisfaction or because one is curious and interested (p.71).

When looking at motivation as intrinsic or extrinsic, it is important for universities with concerns related to student satisfaction to provide a wide range of opportunities that will appeal to students who have varying motivational factors. Activities such as research and community-based-learning may appeal to an internally motivated student, whereas internships, boot camps and job shadowing may appeal to an externally motivated student. Students who have more internal factors for being involved are not likely to be motivated by activities filled with extrinsic rewards and students with more extrinsic factors are not likely to be motivated in an environment with little structure and infrequent feedback, like in a classroom. While universities and college may focus on providing activities for the “average” student when maintaining efficiency, having a wide range of motivational opportunities can pose a challenge to satisfying students across all levels of motivation (Nowell, 2015). One common factor found in the literature is that

“intrinsically motivated students exhibit greater levels of both educational achievement and subjective well-being than do externally motivated students” (Nowell, 2015, p.856).

What universities and colleges have to do is figure out how to stimulate, grow, create or ignite behavior when looking at student involvement. Student involvement, often times, is a method for students to be kept active through various extra-curricular activities, such as student organizations, academic organizations, and community service (Hanousek & Hegarty, 2015). For a student transitioning from high school to college, student involvement creates a comfort level with other students and, as a result, students are motivated to remain at that college and persist to the next year (p.11).

Self-Determination Theory

When looking at motivation and why students would want to participate in activities outside the classroom, self-determination is a theory that supports understanding the “why.” Self-Determination Theory is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods and investigates a person’s inherent growth and innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci (2000) there are three basic needs of Self-Determination Theory are; competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These three basic needs are essential for having optimal human functioning and a natural tendency for growth and integration. Constructive social development and personal well-being are essential for maximizing human functioning. Self- Determination Theory is a relevant theory as the three basic needs directly correlate with willingness to participate in activities and persistence through college. Having opportunities to satisfy the basic needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy can contribute to student motivation (Johnson et al., 2016). Students with higher levels of self-determination are more likely to engage than students who are not self-determined. Self-

determined students are involved in the learning process of developing skills and knowledge that will contribute to higher GPAs and persistence through college (Gannaoui & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018).

According to Self-Determination Theory (Hill, 2013), motivation can vary from autonomous to controlling motivation, with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation as most commonly used terms. Intrinsic motivation refers to a behavior that is energized by the pleasure derived from engaging in the activity. Students with high intrinsic motivation will engage in tasks because of curiosity, a desire for challenge and a sense of enjoyment associated with the task or activity. This is considered the most autonomous form of motivation because the behavior is completely initiated and controlled by the person. Extrinsic motivation is considered the least autonomous and the most controlling form of motivation. The reason for this is because the behavior is energized by internal or external factors, which include the possibility of rewards, punishment from others or the personal needs that are associated with the avoidance of guilt and shame. When students are invigorated by these extrinsic forms of motivation, students will engage in tasks out of a sense of obligation and/or coercion. While extrinsic motivation is not likely autonomous, there are instances when it can be autonomous. The other motivation discussed in this study is amotivation, which can be defined as the absence of motivation and is associated with feelings of incompetence and helplessness (Hill, 2013). According to the study conducted by Hill (2013), it looked at first-year students and their motivations for attending and continuing in college. From the research three types of motivation groups were identified: the first group will have a motivational profile characterized by truly autonomous motivation (high levels of intrinsic and identified motivation in combination with low levels of introjected motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation). The second group will have a motivational

profile characterized by a combination of high levels of both autonomous and controlled motivation with low amotivation (high levels of intrinsic, identified, introjected, and extrinsic motivation with low levels of amotivation). The third group will have a motivational profile characterized by a combination of low-to-moderate levels of autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation (low-to-moderate levels of intrinsic, identified, introjected, and extrinsic motivation with amotivation).

The finding of the research conducted by Hill (2013) on first year students and their motivation to attend college showed there are expected differences between the groups when reporting university experience, depending on the degree to which the student felt more autonomous or more controlled motivation was present. When comparing the groups, the truly autonomous motivation group reported having the most positive university experience (higher levels of perceived academic ability, enjoyment, and satisfaction with university life, as well as lower levels of boredom and anxiety). In comparison, and vastly different, the low-to-moderate autonomous, controlled and amotivated group reported the least positive university experience (lower levels of perceived academic ability, enjoyment, and satisfaction with university life, as well as higher levels of boredom and anxiety). Lastly, the group with high levels of both autonomous and controlled motivation reported a largely positive university experience; similar levels of perceived academic ability, enjoyment, satisfaction, and boredom to the truly autonomous motivation group but with higher levels of anxiety (Hill, 2013).

Motivation that is considered controlling is thought to be an invigorating autonomous motivation that leads to similar levels of engagement. The research done on motivation and engagement shows that a large proportion of activities within a university setting are independent tasks, and getting students to higher levels of engagement will require an increase in extrinsic

controls (e.g., monitoring, rewards, and sanctions) or tasks designed to increase and maximize interest and curiosity. Research supports adopting Self-Determination Theory as a method for implementing and creating more opportunities for curiosity and interest among college students (Hill, 2013).

Autonomous motivation appears to be the best method for encouraging positive emotional experiences and behaviors not associated with controlling motivation. Universities that can promote more autonomous motivation for attending the university and involvement in university activities will help with avoiding difficulties that may arrive during the college experience (Hill, 2013).

Expectancy Value Theory

Helming and Scweinle (2011) discuss Expectancy Value Theory in that one's expectancy for success and the value of the activity are directly related to the person's choice in activity. When looking at chosen classes and participation in activities outside the classroom, it could be assumed that students would pursue classes and activities they feel they can do well in and with some level of challenge that can be overcome. Goals for an activity and whether one expects to be successful, affects the student's motivation for wanting to pursue that activity and the experience that comes from the activity. Success as a task not only affects motivation, but also higher efficacy, involvement and intrinsic interest (p.529).

Student motivation plays a vital role in student involvement, which is associated with student success. Students who are in a supportive environment where they feel valued are more likely to be engaged and participate in classroom discussion (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). Motivation, according to Tasgin and Coskun (2018), is an important factor that affects all areas of learning and practice. Motivation can be intrinsic and /or extrinsic in nature, but it all affects why a

person does what they do and informs their desire to achieve their goals. Motivated students, regardless of intrinsic or extrinsic reasons, are willing to engage and participate in the practice of learning (p.945). These students will make more effort even in the face of a challenge and they will do tasks without being asked (Tasgin & Coskun, 2018). This is seen when students participate in activities outside the classroom that will help in their long-term goals. Their motivation propels them to seek out other opportunities to grow and learn. Tasgin and Coskun (2018) asked several research questions about students' attitudes towards learning. Do the academic motivations of university students' attitude toward learning differ significantly according to gender? Do the academic motivations of university students' attitude toward learning differ significantly according to grade level? Is there a significant correlation between university student's attitudes towards learning and academic motivations?

This research utilized a correlational design using surveys from 260 students at a university in Turkey, which provided quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions. The researchers used two different instruments to collect data with one being a five-point Likert scale and the second a 7-point Likert scale. Junior level students were more conscious and open towards learning than freshmen. Further, Tasgin and Coskun (2018) found that as students' progress in their academic career, learning and being open to activities and opportunities becomes more important as students get deeper into their major and closer to graduation. Johnson, Taasoobshirazi, Clark, Howell, and Breen (2016) investigated motivational differences by student status and identified motivational variables that best predict academic achievement by student status. Following a survey of 139 college students attending a large urban research institution in the Midwest, Johnson et al. (2016) examined the motivational differences between traditional and non-traditional students. What was found is that they differ in self-efficacy, peer

learning, external regulation and intrinsic motivation, with non-traditional students having a higher average on the variables in all areas which indicates that the two populations experience and pursue their academic work with differing motivations, regardless of GPA outcome (Johnson et al., 2016). Johnson et al. (2016) concluded that some areas on campus can provide additional resources and educational experiences to support motivation in students, particularly for non-traditional students, who may have other factors impeding their pursuit of higher education, such as family, work, and finances.

Self-efficacy, control beliefs and perceived competence have all been associated with expectancy, but at its core, expectancy is that people believe, to a certain level, that they are able to accomplish tasks successfully and are accountable for their own achievement (Brouwer et al., 2016). According to researchers Brouwer, Jansen, Hofman, and Flache (2016), “expectancy or belief in one’s own capabilities for achieving the requirements successfully was especially important early in the academic year, because it influenced the extent to which the student was willing to put effort into studying” (p. 380). Studies prior to this research tested the relationship between motivational beliefs and student success and found motivational beliefs might facilitate the relationship to educational productivity and student success in the student’s first year of college. Achievement motivation as it relates to expectancy value theory focuses on the students’ expectancy for success and their perceived growth in academic development. Students who expect to be successful are more persistent in achieving academic goals (Hanousek and Hegarty, 2015).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one of the strongest motivational predictors of academic achievement (Johnson et al., 2016). Self-efficacy is defined as a person’s feeling that they can successfully

perform a behavior or task required to reach an outcome. Self-efficacy is one's own perception on their ability to complete a task or accomplish a goal. It affects an individual's behavior in three ways: decision to approach activity, performance and persistence.

When looking at students in the academic realm, self-efficacy is one's feeling of self-confidence in completing an academic task and achieving goals (Gannaoui & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018). According to Wu and Fan (2017), there is a positive relationship between student's self-efficacy and academic achievement; students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to participate in activities and persist in academic tasks. Those same students will also put forth a greater effort, specifically in their learning environments (p. 697).

Gannaoui and Ramboarison-Lalao (2018) looked at the relationship between leadership and self-efficacy and self-determination in student success and found that there was no correlation between leadership on a student's GPA and intention to persist but did find an indirect relationship with self-efficacy and concluded that through leadership a student develops self-efficacy. The results of the study did show a positive effect of leadership on the three dimensions of self-determination, meaning that leadership helped students to become autonomous in their choices, competent in their ability and relate more with fellow students. While the study failed to show many thoughts on leadership and how it relates to GPA, it did show the positive effect of self-efficacy and leadership on student academic performance. According to the finding of the study, leadership develops self-efficacy and by doing so students become more confident. They are able to overcome obstacles, are more determined to complete tasks, persist more, have higher results and achieve their goals (Gannaoui & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2018). Other research shows that students who hold more leadership positions score significantly higher on measures of congruence, commitment, consciousness of self,

collaboration, handling controversy with civility, citizenship, overall, socially responsible leadership, resiliency, leadership efficacy, complex cognitive skills, and social perspective-taking (Coker et al., 2017).

Summary

Student Alumni Associations offer opportunities for students to enhance leadership skills by giving them opportunities to interact with prominent alumni and dignitaries of the university. Student Alumni Associations also provide work-related skills that can have a positive effect on a student's work situations. There are several similarities and skills that can be applied from a student organization to a work environment, such as working with peers, learning the value of teamwork, and managing people while appreciating differences. Learning these skills before entering the workforce increases a student's sense of self-confidence and improves upon their poise in professional situations (Baliek & Lloyd, 1998). Experiences that students have had in programs like student alumni associations have shown to be invaluable to student learning outside-of-the classroom (Singer & Highey, 2001).

When looking at persistence and graduation, key factors for college/university student success include motivation, participation and/or involvement, and self-efficacy. Studies on motivation related to self-determination theory were found to support a student's ability to have autonomy, competence and relatedness as basic needs that supports academic performance (Gutiérrez & Tomas 2018). Students must feel that they are capable to succeed and are able to persist through all obstacles and challenges as they arise in college. Students are more likely to persist and graduate when they are involved as valued members of the institution (Tinto, 2002). The amount of time and the quality of the interactions with faculty, staff and peers in and out of the classroom are strong predictors for persistence in college (Tinto, 2002). Student participation

and involvement in activities are determined by the student's self-efficacy and their perception that they can achieve their goals and succeed. When students are motivated, self-determined and feel supported by faculty, staff and peers, they are better equipped to deal with the challenges they will face in college and after graduation.

While some may argue that student participation is determined by their motivation to succeed, there are other factors that assist with student learning, such as having resources and activities that support and encourage motivation among peers, faculty and staff. Having opportunities to be involved outside of the classroom have shown to be effective in positive perceptions of college and a student willingness to stay at that college. Self-Determination theory looks at the three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy in order to be motivated and determined. As discussed, students with a higher sense of autonomy were more motivated by internal factors and when students feel competent and can relate, they have a better sense of self in their ability to achieve success. A student who takes on leadership roles, which may occur outside of the classroom, may experience greater self-efficacy as the student feels more autonomous in making decisions, more competent in their abilities, and more relatable to other students. An increase in leadership opportunities and a feeling of confidence will build a student's self-efficacy and increase the student's academic performance, which can lead to persistence and graduation. Outside activities and resources have also shown to be a major factor for non-traditional students as research has shown they need more support to persist in college.

Expectancy Value Theory looks at student's expectancy to succeed and the value they place in the activity. This will motivate the student to choose activities where they feel they can reach their goal and be successful. Student persistence and graduation from college is based on

student motivation and the desire to succeed. Having the right opportunities only supports the student's motivation and will increase their likelihood to persist when obstacles and challenges occur. Motivation is imperative to students being determined to succeed in the classroom and seeking outside opportunities that will support them academically and socially to achieve their goals. University and colleges rankings and success are determined by the student perceptions and positive experiences.

Motivation is the key factor in getting students to complete goals to become successful alumni. Student satisfaction has been linked to student retention, especially with first year students (Nowell, 2015). Universities or colleges that are concerned with retention must provide a wide range of motivational opportunities that can meet a student's goal and look for ways to appeal to students internal and external motivations (p. 864).

Students who are motivated to be involved and participate in campus life activities are more likely to persist through college and have a stronger connection to their university (Singer & Hughey, 2002). Students who participate in student alumni associations are gaining out-of-class opportunities that will enhance their leadership and social skills, and for many students these opportunities are invaluable (p. 65). Student involvement is vital to educational learning environments. When departments create opportunities for students to be involved through student organizations, such as student alumni associations, can "shape and guide students towards meaningful educational and developmental growth" (Gaier, 2001, p. 9).

Chapter Three

Methods

The USF Student Alumni Association (SAA) lacks participation by a large proportion of its members in annual events and activities. The SAA has a large population of student members, but a very small percentage of those student members participate in the activities designed to promote their academic and career success.

The Evaluation questions addressed participation in the Student Alumni Association and the student's opinion if involvement in the program has affected their persistence in college. The three evaluation questions are the following:

1. Why do college students choose to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?
2. What factors motivate college students to participate in activities with the Student Alumni Association?
3. Why do college students choose not to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?

While serving as the evaluator for this program evaluation, it was also noted that the evaluator also works for the Alumni Association and directly oversees the Student Alumni Association. As an employee within the Alumni Association, you are able to see firsthand the activity and inactivity of members of the SAA. The problem of practice with the SAA over course of the program's existence has been to increase student participation within the program. In this dual role, as evaluator and employee, they were able to evaluate the program for its

benefits and areas of improvement and use what was learned to propose and implement needed changes to make the program more beneficial to students and garner more participation in the program from members. Students were aware of this dual role before the start of each focus group and interview and they were asked to be open and honest in their responses as this evaluation would be used to improve the program. The Executive Director of the Alumni Association was supportive of this evaluation and advised to collect whatever information was needed to support this effort. There is a high interest in this evaluation as it has immediate implications on the program and decisions that are made for events and activities planned.

Methodology

This study operated from an Interpretive/Constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, reality is socially constructed and created by individual or groups to ascertain underlying meaning of events and activities (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). Gathering students' perceptions of their involvement with the Student Alumni Association helped to determine how the activities and events affected their persistence in college and ultimate graduation. In addition, students interpreted their own motivation to participate in the events and activities.

Data Collection

The method used to collect data from students and alumni was focus groups and interviews. For the focus groups and interviews, students and alumni from the Student Alumni Association were recruited through email to participate in virtual focus groups and interviews, per USF guidelines pertaining to the COVID-19 virus for meetings. Within the email, students were given a link to sign up where they signed up for a specific focus group day and time. Each focus group had five open slots available for students, so as to limit the number of people at each focus group to a manageable number. For the virtual focus groups and interviews, the

meetings were recorded through Microsoft Teams. Each focus group and interview lasted on average twenty-eight minutes, depending on the number of students participating and the length of responses from participants. Table 1 outlines the number of focus group conducted, number of students and alumni participating in each focus group, and the length of time for each focus group.

Table 1
Student Alumni Association Evaluation Focus Group Participants

	Number Invited	Number Attended	Length
Focus Groups- Active			
3/17/21	5	1	37 minutes
3/19/21	5	1	23 minutes
3/22/21	5	1	29 minutes
4/2/21	5	1	13 minutes
4/7/21	5	1	12 minutes
4/21/21	5	1	13 minutes
Focus Group- Non-Active			
3/19/21	5	3	40 minutes
3/25/21	5	3	40 minutes
4/5/21	5	3	26 minutes
Focus Group - Alumni			
4/9/21	6	2	49 minutes
4/19/21	6	3	26 minutes

Note: Students identified for focus groups participated in at least one event since September 2020

Some written notes were also taken during the focus groups and interviews that focused on common terms used by students and alumni. The data were prepared by reviewing the audio, transcribing interviews and focus groups meetings, and preparing an abridged transcript with key elements and ideas stated from each participant. The data was analyzed using a classic approach where commonalities were identified among the answers provided. Similar answers were group together to establish themes.

Focus Group and Interview Method

The focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured format where students and alumni were asked pre-determined questions, but with flexibility in asking questions as students and alumni answered several questions in one response (See Appendix A and B). Focus groups were separated by their membership type: Active, Non-Active and Alumni. Additional questions were added as needed, to help a student or alum elaborate on a point they were making.

All participants were given a letter to identify if they were an Active (A), Non-active (N) or Alumni (AL) focus group, a letter and number to organize and identify each participant from each group. For example, Active Focus Group 1, Active Focus Group 2, and Active Focus Group 3. From each focus group, each participant was then given an individual number and a focus group number depending on which focus group they were in. So participant AF1-1 (active focus group 1, participant 1), participant AF1-2, (active focus group 1, participant 2) participant AF2-1, (active focus group 2, participant 1).

Upon completion of focus groups, participants were notified that they may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to gain more information if needed, with all participants agreeing to additional interviews. Students and alumni were chosen for an additional interview based on their extensive and in-depth responses during their initial focus group. Students and alumni were sent follow-up emails requesting an additional interview and a time was scheduled for the interview. Five follow-up interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, with the interviews conducted using a semi-structured format with pre-determined questions. (See Appendix C and D). Students and alumni who were interviewed were also given an individual letter and number to identify. For example, Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 3, participant I1

(interview 1, participant 1), participant I2 (interview 2, participant 2). Table 2 outlines the dates of the individual interviews and length of each interview.

Table 2
Student Alumni Association Evaluation Individual Interview Participants

	Participant	Length
Interview- Active		
4/6/21	1	33 minutes
5/10/21	1	14 minutes
Interview- Non-Active		
4/12/21	1	14 minutes
4/30/21	1	14 minutes
Interview - Alumni		
5/4/21	6	14 minutes
4/12/21	1	14 minutes

Participants

Twenty members of the University of South Florida SAA were interviewed for the evaluation. Table 3 shows the demographics of the participants of the evaluation. Both active and non-active students participated in the evaluation with 60% of the participants being non-active members of the Student Alumni Association and 40% being active. Non-active members were defined as students who attended less than four events since joining the organization and active members is defined as student who have attended four or more events with the Student Alumni Association. In addition to current students, five alumni were interviewed for the evaluation. All five members were considered active members of the Student Alumni Association, having attended more than four events while students at USF. Of the 15 student participants, there was one sophomore, six juniors, seven seniors, and one graduate student. The student sample also included six white students, three African American students, two, Latino students and three representing other minorities. Within the minorities four were international students representing Bangladesh, Jamaica and Haiti.

Table 3
Student Alumni Association Evaluation Participant Demographics

	Active	Non-Active	Alumni
Ethnicity			
White	2	4	4
African American	1	2	1
Latinx	0	2	0
Other	3	1	0
*International	2	2	0
College Level			
Sophomore	1	0	NA
Junior	3	3	NA
Senior	2	5	NA
Alumni	0	0	5
Membership Type			
Paid	1	1	2
USF Credit Union	5	8	3

Note: International is in addition to ethnicity. Students considered international also fall into one of the four categories (White, African American, Latinx and Other)

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through email. The Student Alumni Association maintains a list of all members and that list was used to recruit students to participate in the focus groups. Students who choose to volunteer for the focus group sign up for one the focus groups using an online tool called Sign-up Genius. In the email request students had two options to choose from for signing up: active and non-active.

Participant Risks

The risks of participation are minimal. However, there is the risk of being identified. All participants were given pseudonyms and identifying information (including, especially, participants’ roles on the project) was disguised. In publications and presentation, results will be presented generally and not linked to any one individual.

Potential Benefits to Participants

There are no known benefits to participating in this evaluation. However, participants in qualitative interviews tend to report that they become more self-aware and appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

Participant Consent

Prior to the focus groups and interviews participants understood the voluntary nature of the evaluation and that they were free to leave the evaluation at any point. Participants were reminded at the beginning of each focus group and interview that they could opt to exclude elements or the entirety of their focus group comments or interview from the evaluation. All participants were given pseudonyms and identifying information (including, especially, participants' roles on the project) was disguised.

Data Analysis

The data used is qualitative data collected from interviews and focus groups conducted with students. The data were transcribed from the interviews and common themes from among the responses received from students were identified. The responses were reviewed from each participant to each question to find common or similar responses. Once those similar responses are determined, they were coded based on common themes to form a data set. The data was reviewed several times to ensure the correct coding had been applied. The data was maintained in a filing system based on interview, focus group and data set formed from the coding process. From those themes, it determined if there was any relation to the theories presented in the evaluation and discusses any commonalities. .

To test the validity and trustworthiness of the responses, the questions for the interviews and focus groups were pilot tested among a small group of students prior to conducting the focus group and interviews to test the appropriateness of each question to the subject matter.

Data Monitoring

There is no hard copy data; all data is electronic. Electronic data was stored on a student BOX account that is password protected. Data was monitored on a bi-weekly basis to ensure it was corrupted and filed appropriately.

Assumptions

1. Students will be candid and forthright in giving responses to questions.
2. Students will provide information that is relevant to evaluation of program.
3. Data received from students will be evaluated for common themes and grouped together as such.

Summary

In order to investigate student involvement and motivation to participate with the Student Alumni Association and its affects self-efficacy and persistence through college, a full analysis and evaluation of the Student Alumni Association was conducted looking at key factors of motivation to participate, reasons for not participating and meaningful events and activities. By conducting this evaluation, it gave some insight into why students are not participating with the Student Alumni Association and what can be done to improve participation. Following the program evaluation, recommendations are provided to improve participation in the Student Alumni Association as well as valuable information to support the benefits of student participation in the program.

Chapter Four

Findings

This chapter contains the results of the analysis conducted from members of the Student Alumni Association to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. Why do college students choose to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?
2. What factors motivate college students to participate in activities with the Student Alumni Association?
3. Why do college students choose not to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?

Data Analysis Process

The data were prepared by reviewing the audio and preparing an abridged transcript with key elements and ideas stated from each participant. The data were analyzed using a classic approach where commonalities among the responses were reviewed (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Similar responses were grouped together to establish themes.

Each participant was given a letter to identify if they were active, non-active or alumni and a number to organize and identify each participant from each group (i.e., Active Focus Group 1, Non-Active Focus Group 2, and Alumni Focus Group 3). From each focus group, each participant was then given a number and a focus group number depending on which focus group they were in (i.e., participant AF-1-1, active focus group 1, participant 1; participant NF-1-2, non-active focus group 1, participant 2; participant AL-2-1, alumni focus group 2, participant 1).

Themes were established by reviewing the responses each participant provided to each question and finding common or similar responses. Once those similar responses were determined, they were grouped together to form themes.

Using an Interpretive/Constructivist paradigm (Lichtman, 2012), students' perceptions of their involvement was used to help determine how the activities and events affected their persistence in college and ultimate graduation. In addition, students interpreted their motivation to participate in the events and activities. Students were asked questions based on their membership status with the Student Alumni Association: Active or Non-active. Each group of students was asked how they became a member of the Student Alumni Association and what they know about the organization, but not every group was asked what factors would contribute to them attending (motivation) and what have they gained from attending (persistence through college).

Themes

Based on the responses, the following themes were established: Career Readiness, Social and Spirited Engagement, and Marketing and Advertising.

Career Readiness

All of the alumni had an understanding of the Student Alumni Association and its intended purpose, whereas nine of the 15 active students had no or a limited understanding of the purpose of the program. Six of the 15 active students were able to articulate the purpose of the program: to connect student to alumni and provide opportunities to help with career readiness. Career readiness is described for this evaluation as the Student Alumni Association providing programs and events to prepare students for career opportunities, whether that is an alumni career workshop or a resume writing workshop or interview workshop. Thirteen of the 15

students identified the Student Alumni Association as an organization with career events available to students and provided options in which students were interested in participating. Both students and alumni responded with an eagerness to have programs help with entering the workforce and growing within their career. Seven of the 15 students said they utilized the events provided by the Student Alumni Association to assist with their career readiness. All six active students (40% of participants) from the interviews found value in the Student Alumni Association's career readiness events, even if the event was career specific and did not relate directly to their major. Those students stated that there was some general information they could take away that would assist with overall career growth. In the active focus group, one student stated, "You can connect with people that are in the field of the study or in the field of interest that have already graduated, and you can ask insightful questions and they typically have insightful answers" (AF-2, participant 1, personal communication, March 19, 2021). This statement and other like it shows that students felt the career readiness programs fostered connections with alumni in their career field that would help with their career goals. Students also stated that attending the career readiness events helped them to be more focused in class and motivated them to seek out opportunities to assist with their future plans, such as internships or using career networking platforms like LinkedIn to help with career plans.

Social and Spirited Engagement

Students and alumni had favorable responses to the social and school spirited opportunities that the Student Alumni Association provided. The social and school spirited events that were identified in the interviews included getting a T-shirt for athletic events; attending Week of Welcome activities, ice cream socials and athletic watch parties, with all students attending these events with friends. All of the social events included some sort of

giveaway and/or free food to entice students to attend. Three of the 15 students specifically stated that if their friend was attending an event, they would be more likely to attend, with the remaining student participants nodding in agreement. In fact, two inactive students specifically stated that they received Beat T-shirts because their friend told them about it and encouraged them to attend to receive one as well. It was also noted that the Beat T-shirt was particularly important to the students in getting more involved with the Student Alumni Association and the Beat T-shirt had more of an impact on their involvement as a first-year student, as it was more important to them at that stage of school to get “free stuff”

The majority of the students responded positively to the Week of Welcome event being their first introduction to the Student Alumni Association and the enticement of free food and giveaways is what sparked their interest in attending. From the interviews it was a very common theme for the students to respond that free food is a major factor for why they would attend any event at USF.

The alumni also stated that their involvement in the Student Alumni Association was in large part due to a friend encouraging them to attend an event, with four of the five alumni stating they attended their first event due to a friend’s encouragement to attend. While free food is not necessarily a social or spirited engagement, it is a reason for students to come together and attend events and the alumni stated that free food was a factor for their willingness to attend and that free food is important to a lot of college of students. One participated stated “As a freshman I would attend to get a sense of community and help transition to USF” (NF-2, participant 1, personal communication, March 25, 2021).

Social Engagement is in large a main focal point for involvement with the Student Alumni Association, students wanting to connect with other students, having that encouragement

to attend and seeing other students participating in events was key for the students in the interviews to want to participate themselves.

Marketing and Advertising

Marketing and advertising as it relates to the Student Alumni Association is described as the way in which the Student Alumni Association markets the program and advertises the events to students, whether by email, social media or other methods of communication.

According to all of the student participants, the method in which the events are communicated to them is important, not only for finding out about the events, but also in terms of persuading them to attend the events. Thirteen students (66%) of the student participants felt the best method of communication was through email. Four participants (20%) felt events like Bull Market was the best way to communicate event, and the other 14% gave varying methods of communicating such as college listservs, social media, text message system and announcements made at the beginning of classes. Overall, all student participants felt that informal communication such as friends telling them about events was very effective for them knowing about events and increased their likelihood of attending the event when they knew someone who was attending.

In addition to the method of communication, students were very clear on the messaging of the event also affected their likelihood of attending events. All student participants stated the messaging provided about the events was not always clear, indicating students did not have an understanding of what the event was about and who was going to be there. A specific example of this is the Student Alumni Association's Career Conversation event. This is an event where alumni come and share information about their careers and the journey they took to get to where they are at currently within their career. This type of event was specific to a college major, with alumni from specific majors invited to be on the panel. The majority of the students stated the

content in the message of the event was not clear and decreased their likelihood of attending. They also stated that not enough information was provided about the event to encourage their attendance. This was especially true for students whose major or career aspirations were not in that field of study but still could have gained valuable information from attending if they knew who the speakers were and their background. Several students stated that if a biography about the panels had been provided in advance, they might have attended. Lastly, four of the 15 participants stated they attended the Career Conversation due to encouragement from another person, otherwise they would not have attended the event.

Another factor as it relates to communication is the look of the content of the flyers, social media posts, emails. More than 50% stated the look of the emails, flyers and social media posts were not trendy or inviting. Of these 50% of made statements about the look of the flyers, two students suggested more information should be on the flyers to let students know what the event was about and who was going to be there. One of the 50% of students stated that less information was needed and if a flyer was too “wordy” they would not read it. All student participants agreed that showing pictures of the events on social media sites was important to show other students that students actually do attend these events. Pictures would also give students an idea of the event of was like.

Membership Type

This evaluation was to look at why students attend or not attend events within the Student Alumni Association and the focus groups to collect this information was divided into three categories: Active members, Non-Active members and Alumni. Membership type was important to distinguish for the evaluation to determine whether being active or non-active made a difference in the student’s knowledge of the organization and if their involvement influenced

their persistence in college. The alumni category was important to give perspectives if their participation in the Student Alumni Association benefited them through college and in their current career. I grouped participants to analyze why students –by group--are active in the Student Alumni Association, why students are not active, and if the Student Alumni Association had any effect on persistence through college. All three groups are important for evaluating the motivational factors for attending events and if their involvement assisted with persistence through college. Other information collected from the students and alumni were how they became a member of the organization. To become a member of the Student Alumni Association students either paid for the membership or they received the membership when they opened an account with the USF Federal Credit Union. This is an important factor to determine if the way in which a student became a member affected their involvement in the organization.

Of the 20 student and alumni participants, five students or 25% of the population paid for the membership and the other 15 students or 75% became members through the partnership agreement with the USF Credit Union for students who open a credit union account. Only one student (16%) in the active membership category, one student (11%) in the non-active membership category, and two alumni (4%) paid for their membership in the Student Alumni Association.

Three groups were interviewed for this evaluation: active student members, non-active student members and alumni. This part of the evaluation will discuss specific responses from each of the groups.

Active Student Members

Active students accounted for six of the 15 participants (40%) in this evaluation. When asked “what do you know about the Student Alumni Association,” all active participants were

able to articulate the Student Alumni Association is a program to connect students with alumni and provide career opportunities with alumni

These group of students have participated in a wide range of activities that include picking up t-shirts before athletic events, attending professional development events like job interview preparation, networking and professional dinner etiquette. Students have connected with alumni through career conversation workshops and dinners with alumni from specific careers. Lastly, student have connected with each other through socials and week of welcome events. According to A-Focus Group 2, participant 1, the student stated:

I would say I say events helped me build school spirit. I feel more connected on campus. Feel more connected to my peers, feel more connected to the alumni association and the USF alumni as well help with my career development.

Active participants, when asked what they gained from their involvement with the Student Alumni Association, stated that it helped them to feel more engaged with USF and connected with to their peers. They also stated it helped them to build school spirit. Students also stated the information provided through the workshops was good and worthwhile, it helped them to stay focused and see beyond graduation. One student stated the following in relation to involvement with the Student Alumni Association:

It has made me feel more involved on campus and in turn that motivates me to finish classes, to get better grades, to act like my college experience helps my career at USF. My degree, my classes are a priority because when you feel more involved in campus and, it's a more intimate environment where you feel that you're valued and you're enjoying your time on campus and you are more connected, but also you have a better relationship with your peers and the environment, environment leads you to strive to do better in classes.

Overall, the active student members stated the information provided at the events was something that is not talked about a lot but was very valuable and important.

Non-Active Student Members

Non-active members are students who participated in less than four events with the Student Alumni Association. This particular group was important in helping the evaluator understand why students do not participate and what factors would motivate them to attend Student Alumni Association events. Several key questions were asked of this group to gain insight into their lack of participation in the program. All nine students who participated in the non-active focus groups were in either their third or fourth year at USF. All but one student became a member of the Student Alumni Association through the USF Credit Union.

This group of students had limited or no understanding of the Student Alumni Association and the purpose of the program. Two students specifically said they only knew about the Student Alumni Association through their involvement with another student organization but had no understanding of the program's purpose. The other seven students stated that the program connects students to alumni and prepares you to become an engaged alumnus, but no one in this group could give an in-depth account of the program or its purpose.

When asked why they were not involved in the program, students offered several reasons. Three of the nine students stated that free food or a giveaway would motivate them to attend. They said that they attend events to be able to eat a meal that they otherwise would have to pay for and if they were to get more out of it the event then just food that would be bonus. Two students stated that if it was not required for class they would not attend. One student stated they felt they could receive the same kind of workshops within their college and did not see the need to attend an event within the SAA. Two students also stated that the location of the event was the reason for not attending, as they felt the Alumni Center was "too far" and not convenient to get to on campus. With the university moving all classes and events to a virtual format due to the

pandemic, students also stated they were “burnt out” from attending virtual events and were not interested in attending virtual events in their leisure time. One student stated specifically that after taking a full load of classes “The last thing I wanted to do was log in to a Teams event, so that affected my involvement” (NF-3, participate 2, personal communication, March 25, 2021). All students stated the marketing of the program was not always clear, so they did not see or know the benefits of attending. One student stated, “knowing who the specific alumni were attending, not just saying alumni was too broad, but if I knew person A is coming and what they specialize in, I know that person is going to be a good resource for me” (NF-2, participant 1, personal communication, March 19, 2021)

Students were also asked what events could be added that would interest or motivate them to attend the Student Alumni Association events. Students indicated they would be interested in a mentorship program, a career fair for members only, a banquet/signature event for seniors, competitive events for prizes, and social events with alumni that were less formal.

Overall, the nine students viewed the Student Alumni Association as valuable program to assist students with connecting with alumni and getting prepared for life after USF. Not having a clear understanding of the purpose of the program and the benefits of being a member affected their motivation and willingness to participate. They felt with improvements to the program such as better communication, marketing events effectively and changing the location would increase not only their participation, but most other students’ participation in the program.

Alumni

Alumni are students who have graduated from USF. For this evaluation five alumni were interviewed for their perceptions of the program and what, if anything, was gained from participating. The five alumni all were considered active with the Student Alumni Association

and served in a leadership role with the organization. The alumni are also considered young or recent alumni, as they all graduated within the last two years from USF.

Of the five alumni, three paid for their memberships and two became members through the USF credit union. All of the alumni had a clear understanding of the program and could articulate the purpose of the program. They viewed the program as a way to gain career skills to help in a professional environment and to socialize with friends and increase school spirit. They also stated that the Student Alumni Association was to motivate and encourage students to become more involved with the Alumni Association after graduation. As stated by one alum (ALF-1, participant 1, personal communication, April 9, 2021), the Student Alumni Association's purpose was very clear to them

The Student Alumni Association is about promoting team spirit and spirit within your university. Also having the opportunity to become a better professional. So, when you're graduating, you're, well-versed in how to ace the interview, how to talk to people 1, and you also have good points of contact because you've been networking with these people. Because of their involvement as a leader with the organization they attended every event the program had to offer. All five alumni stated that their involvement was increased by their leadership role with the organization and by being more involved in the planning of events had a better understanding of the purpose of the program and were more motivated to attend. In terms of marketing and advertising, the alumni stated that email and word of mouth were the best ways to communicate to them about events prior to having a leadership role within the organization. Three of the five stated that it was friends who encouraged them to attend events like Week of Welcome and dinners with alumni. They also stated that emails were effective for them in learning about events, such as the Beat T-shirt pick-up days. When asked what they gained from attending the Student Alumni Association events, the alumni spoke about having the ability to network with alumni, learn how to utilize professional networking sites like LinkedIn

and gain skills to help with interviews. One alum stated, “It taught me truly how to interact and network 100%. It's like the most subtle little things that made me change as a person. It teaches you how to approach professional situations and socialize” (ALF-1, participant 2, personal communication, April 9, 2021).

The alumni also spoke about how the events helped them to become more social with other USF students and feel more engaged and connected to the university. Lastly the alumni talked about the interactions with alumni was out of their normal comfort zone, but it helped them to gain more confidence in themselves and in their future plans, knowing that an alum had been through the same classes and activities as themselves.

Three of the five alumni spoke about how the Student Alumni Association motivated them to do well in class because they were hearing from alumni the importance of getting a good GPA or taking courses that would help with careers. One of the alumni stated that knowing the alumni who participated in events went through the same as them and to see where they were in their career motivated them to do well in class to follow in the same footsteps as the alumni at events. Participant 2 from alumni focus group 2 stated “Getting to talk to alumni and see how far they had gotten from graduating and doing some of the same things that I did in college, definitely pushed me to work harder” (personal communication, April 19, 2021).

One alum stated that the events did not contribute to them academically because there was not alumni from their specific major to which they would tie academics to attending the events. However, that same alum stated that one their biggest takeaways was knowing they too can be involved with USF after graduation and engage with students the same way the alumni engaged with them through the Student Alumni Association. All the alumni stated the Student Alumni Association helped them in their career and/or academically to persist through college.

Synthesis of Findings

The findings from this evaluation were that active students had a better understanding of the purpose and mission of the Student Alumni Association than non-active students. It also showed that the method of communication and content within the message was another factor that influenced attendance at SAA events. The findings show that students are more likely to attend when encouraged by a friend or there is a tangible incentive to attend to such as free food. Lastly, students and alumni who participated in the program found the events to be valuable and assisted with their personal and professional development, specifically career readiness. Students specifically gave examples of attending events that directly impacted their ability to do well in a job interview, such as attending a workshop on “Impressing the Recruiter” by utilizing the skills learned in that workshop to apply in their actual interview. Alumni stated that attending these events gave them the confidence needed to interact in a professional environment. In chapter five I will discuss these findings in more detail and how they relate to the theories and the evaluation questions.

Chapter Five

Summary, Recommendations, Conclusion

Summary

The Student Alumni Association (SAA) is a program sponsored by the Alumni Association at the University of South Florida. This program is for current students to join and become members where they will have the opportunity to enhance their college experience by having exclusive opportunities to network with alumni, attend professional development workshops and connect with their peers through spirit events. Students become members in one of two ways: they can pay a one-time membership fee or they become members when they join the USF Federal Credit Union. The goal of the program is for students to become involved and interact with alumni to get a better understanding of the Alumni Association so that when they graduate, they will experience a natural transition as involved alumni.

Currently the Student Alumni Association (SAA) lacks participation by a large proportion of its members in annual events and activities. The SAA has a large population of student members, but a very small percentage of those student members participate in the activities designed to promote their academic and career success. The purpose of this evaluation was to look at participation within the Student Alumni Association and understand why students are or are not active in the program. The questions for this evaluation are:

1. Why do college students choose to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?

2. What factors motivate college students to participate in activities with the Student Alumni Association?
3. Why do college students choose not to participate in the Student Alumni Association at the University of South Florida?

Through interviews and focus groups with various students, three themes were identified: Career Readiness, Marketing and Advertising, and Social and Spirited Engagement. With each major theme, students gave examples that supported their decision to participate or not participate. Based on the results it was determined that students found the SAA events and activities to be very helpful with their career aspirations and confidence in speaking to alumni and potential employers. They felt strongly about the career readiness workshops provided and felt these helped them in their classes and career choice. The social and spirited engagement activities were also well received as these helped to connect members with other students. The area that was lacking and needed improvement was the marketing and advertising of events and activities, as students felt these areas were not adequate. Marketing and Advertising affected their decision to attend or not attend events the most.

Marketing and Advertising

Students who are members of the SAA did not receive what they perceive as effective communication about SAA events and activities offered. Students were not clear on about the purpose of the event, who was going to be in attendance, or the benefits of attending the event. This lack of clarity about events negatively affected students' interest in attending program events. In addition, the SAA did not use multiple resources in communicating to students, mainly relying on email as a way to communicate. Not all students were receptive to the emails, as they receive several emails in any given day. Other resources to communicate to students that

were suggested include social media and word of mouth from friends were the main messaging that would promote attendance. When looking at the SAA, it is important to utilize all methods of communication to reach a broader group of students.

The students also provided thoughts on marketing for these events, giving ideas on how the SAA can improve these efforts. One idea is to make sure the flyers advertising the events are clear on what students will gain from attending. Students want to know if the event is meaningful and has a purpose that will serve them, whether it be for professional or social reasons. Both active and inactive students interviewed agreed that without a clear message of what the event entails, students are not going to attend.

Students who joined through the credit union are a large portion of our members in the SAA, representing 90% of the current members. Though the agreement with the credit union has yielded a significant number of members, it also has led to students not knowing they are member of the SAA. According to the students who became members through the credit union, most of them did not know they were a member initially and only found out when receiving emails to attend events. Even then, it was not clear to many of them that they were members after receiving the emails. Because these students were not made aware that they were members, they often overlooked the emails they received, believing the emails were sent to them in error or just a random email that all students received from USF. Without direct communication to the credit union members, those students did not participate in as many activities, believing they were not members nor understanding what the SAA program offers. Of particular note is that there is no evidence showing that paid students were more active than members who came through the credit union. Student participation was not precipitated by the way they became members but in how the SAA marketed and advertised their events.

Career Readiness

Students found the career readiness workshops to be most beneficial and enjoyed attending those events. Students who attended stated they learned a lot and these helped them with career choices. Even workshops that were not necessarily geared towards their major were deemed valuable for students' interaction with alumni, as the career advice provided was broad enough to be important for any major. Overall, the students found the information to very valuable and helped them in their career search. Students also felt that interacting with alumni gave them the confidence needed during job interviews or networking events. Students specifically gave examples of attending events, such as professional dining etiquette, that helped them learn skills to feel more comfortable and confident when interacting with people in a professional environment. Other events that assisted with their skills was a workshop on utilizing LinkedIn, attending networking events with alumni where they learned to mingle and practice asking questions. Students also stated that attending these events helped them to be more focused in class and more motivated to do well in class, as they were able to understand the relationship between classwork and career preparedness. Self-Determination Theory--specific to student motivation and student success--relies on three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Having the opportunities to satisfy those needs can contribute to student motivation. A student is more likely to engage who has a higher level of self-determination than other students who are not self-determined, as self-determined students are involved in the learning process of developing skills and knowledge that will contribute to higher GPAs and persistence through college (Gannaoui & Lovanirina, 2018). Students are looking for activities that give them the autonomy to choose what they are learning. Students also want to feel confident and competent in their surroundings and students want to have a sense

of belonging and relate to other students and alumni who may be in as similar circumstance and can understand and advise. Events that the SAA provides give students the three psychological needs of the Self-Determination theory and this was realized through the examples and the experiences that students had that had a direct impact on their well-being. When choosing activities on campus, students in their junior and senior year sought connections with alumni and other students that could help with their career. They felt learning and gaining valuable advice and/or direction from those who had been where they were at before would give them an advantage in searching for internships and jobs. Interestingly, juniors and seniors were looking for activities that would support their career interest and provides opportunities that could help with their long-term goals. This also supports self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) in that students were seeking intrinsic rewards as they advanced at the university and the extrinsic rewards of receiving t-shirts and other free items became less important. Several students stated that the free items was the initial draw to SAA, but over time the actual event where they were learning a skill or getting advice became more important and more valuable for what they wanted to achieve long-term. Inactive students in this evaluation stated that they were very selective in events they attended as it was important for them to find events that supported their long-term goal professionally, which aligns with expectancy value theory (Schweinle, & Helming, 2011), when seeking relevance to career goals and the importance of the activity they are attending. Several students, both active and inactive, stated they would not attend events for the sake of attending, but only wanted to attend things that were going to help them after graduation.

Alumni interviewed for this evaluation were most in support of the workshops and spoke highly of how those events helped them to build confidence. Specifically, they said they would

never have felt comfortable applying for jobs without the tools they acquired from attending a SAA workshop. That confidence is what motivated them to apply and feel secure in themselves to achieve their goal. Helming and Scweinle (2011) discuss Expectancy Value Theory in that one's expectancy for success and the value of the activity are directly related to the person's choice in activity. So, when looking at classes and participation in activities outside the classroom one would theorize that students would pursue those classes and activities they feel they can do well in and with some level of challenge the students are able to overcome and succeed. Goals for an activity and whether one expects to be successful effect the student's motivation for wanting to pursue that activity and the experience that comes from the activity. Success as a task not only affects motivation, but also higher efficacy, engagement and intrinsic interest. Self-efficacy is one of the strongest motivational predictors of academic achievement (Johnson et al., 2016). The students and specifically the alumni talked in depth about the confidence they felt from attending SAA events and pursuing their career goals. Self-efficacy was a major motivational factor for the alumni continuing to participate in the SAA. The alum's perception of their ability to be successful was increased by the confidence they gained from attending SAA events, such as professional dining etiquette or "Impressing the Recruiter" workshops. Student and alumni were interested in choosing activities they felt had value and they could be successful with, where they can attain a goal, whether that be to learn what questions to ask during an interview or what one can say or do to stand out from other candidates seeking the same job or internship. These goals were valuable to the students and alumni and having the ability to be involved in the learning process was important for students and alumni involved with the SAA. Once students and alumni from the focus groups felt confident in themselves attending these workshops, their self-efficacy affected their motivation to be

involved, to engaged in the learning of the activity and persist through their academics and other areas of importance, like getting that job after graduation. In the literature (Wu and Fan, 2017) it discusses a positive relationship between student's self-efficacy and academic achievement; students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to participate in activities and persist in academic tasks. Based on the specific examples provided in the evaluation responses from alumni, there was an increase in confidence from attending SAA activities, which increased their self-efficacy and their willingness to persist through college.

Students involved in activities outside the classroom will have more support from fellow students, faculty and advisors who they interact with outside the classroom. Being involved on campus will help build a student's confidence and make them feel capable of overcoming any obstacles that may arise while in college. In looking at Self-Determination theory, students need 3 basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy in order to be motivated and determined. When looking at the SAA, the students and alumni that were active in the program felt more confident in their abilities which had a major effect on their self-efficacy overall. Involvement in activities gave these students and alumni feeling of confidence that built self-efficacy and increase their academic performance and persistence through college.

Social and Spirited Engagement

Generally, all students and alumni agreed that the social connections were important for them wanting to participate in programs. Having friends encouraging them to attend is what helped many of the students and alumni participate in the program. Most students and alumni, particularly as freshmen were looking for activities where they would connect with other students with shared interests both socially and professionally. When choosing involvements, they were looking for an easy way to meet and interact with other students in a fun environment.

Many felt that by attending SAA events there was a sense of community that led them to want to continue to participate in the activities. For many students in this evaluation, especially in their first or second year at USF, getting involved on campus was more about making friends than getting professional development. Intrinsic motivation was a factor for students in this evaluation when looking at the importance of making friends for their reason to participate in the SAA. When students are looking for activities that motivate them it is important to provide a range of opportunities to appeal to a broad range of students and wanting to make friends as an intrinsic motivator was important for members of the SAA to want to participate.

While intrinsic motivation may have been a factor for some students to participate in the SAA, for other students there were extrinsic factors that motivated them to participate. What was learned from the evaluation is some students and alumni initially got involved in the SAA to receive free giveaways, such as t-shirts and food. This aspect of the program is how many non-active student members became active members. Some of the students, who were active stated they only came to SAA events for free stuff. Receiving an email to pick-up a free t-shirt was what they were interested in and would be the only activity they would participate in especially in their freshmen and sophomore years. They stated they preferred the “grab and go” that SAA afforded them when they were not interested in the career readiness portion of the program. When looking at expectancy value theory (Hulleman, et al, 2016), students evaluated the cost of attending, examining the effort it takes to attend, what the value is and whether there is something better to attend. This can negatively impact student participation in the SAA, which was shown by non-active members and members that were initially interested in the grab and go events. Their initial preference for only getting free items was driven by the fact that they did not want to attend events they felt were not worth their time in order to get the free items. For

some these external factors was the only motivation to keep participating in the SAA. What was also very interesting to learn was the extrinsic factors is what motivated students initially to participate but through attending the activities, eventually the intrinsic factors such as making friends and feeling a sense of community is what motivated some students to continue that involvement with the SAA. Several students stated that once they came to an event for the free food or item and engaged with other students and gained valuable advice or insight from an alumnus is what made them want to come back again and while the free item was still something they wanted it became less important to them and the sense of community and the value they saw in the events became more important and the main reason for attending. Compared to students in their first or second year at the University who were influenced by extrinsic rewards, like free t-shirts, upperclassman was more focused on the intrinsic value of attending to help with career goals. Once students saw the usefulness and relevance of the events, and their expectancy for success increased, they were more motivated to attend events because they were able to see how the program could help them be successful. The SAA provided several opportunities for students to be involved, engaged and connected, which is important overall for universities when seeking to retain students year after year. But once students begin to feel confident and determined and are motivated to succeed they will want to persist through college

Recommendations

When looking at the SAA, both student groups and alumni gave ideas that would enhance the program and help with increasing student participation. Marketing and Advertising were the biggest concerns for recruiting members. Flyers should be clear and concise on what the events are and what students will gain from attending. Students want to know if the event is meaningful and has a purpose that will serve them, whether for professional or social reasons. Both students

and alumni interviewed agreed that without a clear message of what the event entails, students are not going to attend.

Students should continue to utilize other students to broaden the reach to get more students to participate. What was evident is that friends encouraging friends to attend events works and for many SAA members, that is what got them to attend and to get involved in leadership roles within the organization. Sharing pictures from events on social media and having student testimonials will increase the likelihood of students participated as they would be seeing other students involved and would spark their interests to get involved with SAA as well.

In terms of events, the SAA should diversity the events further by including more alumni from different backgrounds. Instead of a panel with alumni from one career, have alumni from multiple careers to get more students to attend and repeat workshops in for fall and spring so students who missed the workshop in one semester would have a second chance in the next semester. The SAA may consider providing more hand-on events like resume writing workshops, mock interviews, and elevator speech practices; these are the type of events that would motivate students to attend and would help a lot of other students who may not have access to this through their colleges. Based on the findings, it is evident students closer to graduation would feel more motivated to attend career readiness events than a student at the beginning of their college journey.

Social and spirited events continue to be important to increase participation, especially with first- and second-year students. These events allow students to interact and get to know one another better. While free food is important at events and gets many in the door, most students in the evaluation indicated they are motivated by having meaningful interactions and those are what keeps them coming back.

Some of the limitations of the evaluation were having to conduct interviews virtually. There were no tangible incentives for attending the focus groups, which may have limited participation. In addition, serving in a dual role of evaluator and employee may have hindered some participation in the evaluation as students may not have felt as comfortable. Lastly, the world was in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the university had moved all classes and events virtually, so several students were experiencing covid fatigue and were not as eager to participate in virtual events, which the SAA solely relied on for the 2020-2021 academic year.

The implications from this evaluation are the responses received will be used to improve the program to increase participation at events. The evaluation will serve as guiding tool for making future decisions that will impact the program overall. The findings from the evaluation have already had implications on decisions that are being made in regard to the SAA going into the 2021-2022 academic year. The Alumni Association hired a new Student Program Coordinator, who will work directly with the Director of Student Programs to manage the SAA. This person has a skill set in social media marketing and graphic design to improve marketing and advertisement of events. Because marketing and advertising was an area that needed significant improvement, it has become a focus area for the SAA going into the new academic year. The suggestions recommended by the participants from the evaluation has been utilized, such as using various social media outlets to advertise, being clearer and more concise with the messaging on flyers so students know what to expect and how they can benefit from attending. In addition, the flyers are more graphically appealing to the eye. With social and spirited events being an important way for students to connect with each other, the SAA is now incorporating more social and spirited events for students to engage, which include socials that are being planned by students. Lastly, the growth of the program was noted from hearing from alumni

about the benefits of being involved and having alumni who were once SAA members now serve as speakers at events. Having alumni come back and serve as speakers at workshops shows the full circle of the program and the benefits of being involved with the SAA. Alumni know and understand the benefits of the SAA, and now they are sharing that valuable advice that was given to them to students.

Conclusion

The SAA is a program with a mission to engage and connect students in a meaningful way. Based on the evaluation, students who feel a connection to their university and are involved in activities throughout their college career are more likely to continue that involvement after graduation. Participation in programs like the SAA grow a student affinity to their university and will prompt them to want to give back, whether that be of their time by coming to activities as an alum, their talent by participating in programs to help students or their treasure, by supporting programs financially. Student participation is important not only for the student to help with personal and professional growth, but also for the university in keeping its alumni base involved and contributing to the continued growth of the university.

In looking at Self-Determination Theory, the authors discuss “one’s inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for self-motivation” (Ryan & Deci 2000). The nature of motivation can be internal or external, which contributes to one’s motivation and reasons for achieving goals. Students involved in the SAA were motivated by both external and internal factors for participating. With some having authentic motivations, others were motivated by external factors that are controlled for an action, such as receiving a t-shirt if you attend an event. Many students in this evaluation were initially motivated by extrinsic rewards, such as t-shirts and free food. Over time, these same students looked at getting involved in

activities that could help them with their career and the SAA was a program that provided them with opportunities to gain advice and hear perspectives from alumni who could help them advance in their chosen profession. A sub theory of Self Determination Theory is Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) wherein environmental and social factors contribute to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Tangible rewards certainly affect student motivation, but students were also interested in being able to relate and feel competent in their ability to be successful. The SAA provided opportunities for students to be motivated by extrinsic factors, such as through free items, and by intrinsic factors such as making connections and professional development. Some students may have experienced a motivational shift from wanting the free items to wanting to learn and gain skills to help with career goals. Many students voiced that they felt confident – as their expectation for success increased, so did their self-efficacy.

This evaluation served as a mechanism to look at participation in college students and why they are or are not involved and what motivates them. Based on this evaluation, students were satisfied with the programs being offered in the Student Alumni Association. They felt the career readiness workshops were beneficial and supported their long-term career goals. The students felt the events helped to build their self-confidence and made them feel more comfortable when preparing for job interviews and networking events. The program did help them focus more in classes to see the importance and value of doing well in school. Lastly, the students felt the SAA helped them to feel more connected to USF, make friends, and build a sense of community.

Students choosing to participate in the SAA did so because they felt the program benefited them in ways other activities had not. The interactions with alumni and events to help

them in their career were like none other on campus. Students also wanted to connect socially and were enthusiastic to receive free items as a part of membership.

Students who were not active in the SAA were mainly not active because the marketing and advertising of the program benefits was not clear. Students did not know what they were attending and if it would be beneficial to them, therefore they choose not to participate. Many students and alumni also felt that having their friends encourage them to attend is what made them participate.

Participation in the SAA is important for our students to engage and connect with alumni and with other students. The SAA enhances student's personal and professional development, by building self-efficacy, career readiness and community among other students. Participation in programs like the SAA helps to create opportunities for students to be active and engage who then become active and engaged alumni.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions- Active SAA Members

Introduction

Hello and thank you all for being here today to participating in this focus group. My name is LaToya Wider and I work for the University of South Florida Alumni Association. I am also a doctoral student at USF. I am having this focus group to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation. I am doing a program evaluation on the Student Alumni Association to look at why students to participate in the program and what are the benefits of attending the various events/activities.

From this focus group discussion, I will be able to see the factors for students to participate in the SAA and the benefits of participating in the program, if any. This study will explore if the SAA is providing valuable events and activities that current students need and want to be successful at USF and if there are other resources the Student Alumni Association should be providing.

You all were invited to participate in this focus group because you are members of the Student Alumni Association and can provide insight into your understanding of the Student Alumni Association and why you participate in the events/activities.

Before we begin, I have a few guidelines to help our discussion run smoothly:

- This focus group will be audio recorded, so I can make sure I get everyone's comments

- This is an informal discussion, so let's use first names only. No names will be used in my report, what you say remains confidential.
- I have a few questions to ask to keep the conversation going, but I do ask that only one person speaks at a time. This will help us to hear everyone's feedback and opinion and keep the audio recording clear. But feel free to chime in if you have a similar or different experience or view that you want to share with the group. There are no judgements in this group.
- There are no wrong answers to any of the questions asked tonight, only different opinions and different experiences.
- If you could silence your phones, that would be great. If you need to respond to call or text, please excuse yourself quietly and return to the group as soon as you can.
- My role in this discussion is guide the discussion, so at times I may need to interrupt to keep the discussion moving and to get through all the questions. My apologies in advance if this occurs.
- As I mentioned before this is an informal discussion so feel free to give me your honest opinion on the resources provided on campus and your usage of them.
- Let's get started: Tell me your name and what year you are in at USF?

Type of focus groups: Student Alumni Association (SAA)

What is the purpose of the FGs: To evaluate college student motivation to participation in the SAA and the benefits of participating in the program

Describe participants: Undergraduate students at the University of South Florida who are members of the Student Alumni Association.

Table 1A: Active SAA Members Questions

Category	Question	Minutes
Introduction question/s	How did you become a member of the SAA? (Credit union, pay fee)	5
	What do you know about the SAA	
Key question/s and probes	What events have you participated in?	5
	Of those events attended which events did you like and why? What events did you dislike and why?	15
	What factors contributed to you attending the events?	10
	What have you gained from attending the events? Has it helped with your classes or pursuit of your career? How?	10
	What has been the best method of communicating events/activities to you?	5
Ending question/s	If you could add an event/ activity to the SAA what would it be?	5
	We wanted to know what motivates you to attend events/activities with the SAA and if the SAA is providing valuable benefits to you as a student. You all shared your thoughts and insights on this topic. Is there anything else on SAA that should have been discussed or that I missed?	
Use transition statements or questions as needed		
		Total minutes
		55
Debriefing questions (look at text and class materials for ideas)	Did the student share what they knew about SAA? Did the student share their likes/dislikes and how SAA benefits them? Was enough information given to explain factors for utilizing services?	

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions- Non-Active SAA Members

Introduction

Hello and thank you all for being here today to participating in this focus group. My name is LaToya Wider and I work for the University of South Florida Alumni Association. I am also a doctoral student at USF. I am having this focus group to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation. I am doing a program evaluation on the Student Alumni Association to look at why students to participate in the program and what are the benefits of attending the various events/activities.

From this focus group discussion, I will be able to see the factors for students to participate in the SAA and the benefits of participating in the program, if any. I will also be able to see the factors that contribute to students not participating in the program and why. This study will explore if the SAA is providing valuable events and activities that current students need and want to be successful at USF and if there are other resources the Student Alumni Association could be providing to encourage students to participate.

You all were invited to participate in this focus group because you are members of the Student Alumni Association and can provide insight into your understanding of the Student Alumni Association and why you do not participate in the events/activities.

Before we begin, I have a few guidelines to help our discussion run smoothly:

- This focus group will be audio recorded, so I can make sure I get everyone's comments

- This is an informal discussion, so let's use first names only. No names will be used in my report, what you say remains confidential.
- I have a few questions to ask to keep the conversation going, but I do ask that only one person speaks at a time. This will help us to hear everyone's feedback and opinion and keep the audio recording clear. But feel free to chime in if you have a similar or different experience or view that you want to share with the group. There are no judgements in this group.
- There are no wrong answers to any of the questions asked tonight, only different opinions and different experiences.
- If you could silence your phones, that would be great. If you need to respond to call or text, please excuse yourself quietly and return to the group as soon as you can.
- My role in this discussion is guide the discussion, so at times I may need to interrupt to keep the discussion moving and to get through all the questions. My apologies in advance if this occurs.
- As I mentioned before this is an informal discussion so feel free to give me your honest opinion on the resources provided on campus and your usage of them.
- Let's get started: Tell me your name and what year you are in at USF?

Type of focus groups: Student Alumni Association (SAA)

What is the purpose of the FGs: To evaluate why college students do not participate in the SAA and what factors could contribute to participation.

Describe participants: Undergraduate students at the University of South Florida who are members of the Student Alumni Association.

Table 1B: Non-Active SAA Member Questions.

Category	Question	Minutes
Introduction question/s	How did you become a member of the SAA? (Credit union, pay fee)	10
	What do you know about the SAA and have you participated in any activities?	
Key question/s and probes	Why are you not active in the SAA?	15
	What factors would contribute to you attending events?	10
	If you could add an event/ activity to the SAA what would it be?	10
	What has been the best method of communicating events/activities to you?	5
Ending question/s	We wanted to know why you do not participate in events/activities with the SAA and what factors would contribute to you participating. You all shared your thoughts and insights on this topic. Is there anything else on SAA that should have been discussed or that I missed?	5
		Total minutes
		55
Debriefing questions (look at text and class materials for ideas)	Did the student share what they knew about SAA? Did the students share why they do not participate? Was enough information given to explain factors for not utilizing services?	

Use transition statements or questions as needed

Appendix C

Interview Questions- Active SAA Members

1. Briefly tell me about yourself as a student (major, grade, background, one's identity as a student; are they first generation or minority student?)
2. First let's talk about what activities you are involved in, and the events you attend on campus.
 - a. What activities are you involved in? How long have you been involved in each activity? Why are you involved in each activity?
 - b. What events do you attend? How often do you attend each type of event, and why?
3. Next, let's talk about your participation in the Student Alumni Association (SAA).
 - a. Why do you participate in the SAA?
 - b. To what extent do these activities/events help you with your major/career? To what extent are these activities/events more social in nature?
 - c. What activities do you find most important to your career or socially and why?
 - d. Is it important for you to attend these events? If so why?
 - e. What motivates you to attend these activities? (food, giveaways, professional/personal development)
 - f. What factors would make you want to attend an event outside of the classroom?
Personal/professional gains, giveaway

- g. Do the activities/events help you to strive towards your long-term goals? If so, how? If not, why not?
- h. How confident do you feel when you attend these events?
- i. Do you perceive any barriers or challenges to participating in events/activities on campus? If so, what are they?

Appendix D

Interview Questions- Non-Active SAA Members

1. Briefly tell me about yourself as a student (major, grade, background, one's identity as a student; are they first generation or minority student?)
2. First let's talk about what activities you are involved in, and the events you attend on campus.
 - a. What activities are you involved in? How long have you been involved in each activity? Why are you involved in each activity?
 - b. What events do you attend? How often do you attend each type of event, and why?
3. Next, let's talk about why you are not as active in the Student Alumni Association.
 - a. What are your reasons for not participating in the SAA
 - b. What programs and activities would increase your participation?
 - i. Does the marketing of the event affect you attending? Do you know what the event is about? What type of marketing would increase your interest in attending?
 - ii. What would be the best way to promote the event for you to attend? Please provide examples (social media, emails, etc.).
 - iii. Do you like the choices that offered to you through the SAA? Do you feel there are activities that are missing?

- c. Would your friends attending increase your participation in activities and events in the SAA? How so??
- d. Any other suggestions to increase your participation in activities and events on campus, or other students' participation?