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# Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Communications Media Utilized by the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences

Amanda Nicole Anthony  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Communications Media Utilized by  
the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences

Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Communications Media Utilized by  
the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Agricultural and Extension Education

by

Amanda Anthony  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art, 2011

University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Prof. Leslie D. Edgar, Ph.D.  
Thesis Director

---

Prof. Donna L. Graham, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Prof. Tammy Tucker, M.A.  
Committee Member

---

Prof. K. Jill Rucker, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

Alumni relationship cultivation serves as the foundation of higher education and must be maintained to keep graduates and alma maters connected. To evaluate the success of communications media in reaching recent graduates, classified as Millennials, this study sought to determine Millennial alumni perceptions of media distributed by the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College) from 2012 through 2014. Assessed communications media included *The Graduate* and *AR Culture* magazines, *The Graduate* e-newsletter, tailgate and mocktail party invitations, College website, and social media presences. Active and inactive Millennial alumni ( $N = 20$ ) responses were gathered through telephone interviews, and a qualitative analysis was used to identify emergent themes from participant responses and preferences for communications and giving.

After an analysis of alumni responses, researchers identified *Building the Professional* and *Interest in Giving Back* as emergent themes related to respondents' connection to Bumpers College. Reviewing each of the eight media used in the assessment, five additional themes emerged including *Message Relationship/Consumption*, *Specialized Content*, *Communications Medium/Channel*, *Message Barriers*, and *Need for Branding/Promotion*. Alumni valued *The Graduate* magazine for its professional quality and personal features (Class Notes and Family Album), but found its theme-based structure and impersonal stories to be weaknesses. In contrast, participants liked the student-focused approach to the *AR Culture* magazine but believed its quality could be improved. Participants valued the convenience of the e-newsletter, but noted a need to refine its messaging and restructure the email to increase engagement. Alumni favorably received the tailgate event invitation, but stressed reducing the invitation's content. On the other hand, the mocktail party invitation was too vague for participants to

identify the event's purpose. The Bumpers College's website was viewed as user-friendly; however, alumni content was minimal. Last, most participants were unaware that Bumpers College had any social media presences and emphasized increasing engagement through promotion or two-way communication online.

While findings revealed that the Bumpers College made an impression on participants while they were students, it is recommended that media be adapted to better meet Millennial alumni preferences and, perhaps, assist them in moving from inactive alumni to active.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my family. To my husband, Erik, for being selfless these last two and a half years as I pursued this dream. I would have quickly crumbled without your steadfast support and patience. To my parents, for encouraging me throughout life to reach beyond my perceived capabilities and never discouraging me from studying what I love. To my siblings, Jonathan and Loren, for keeping me laughing and grounded. To my father-, mother-, and brother-in-law, for your compassion and eagerness in helping me succeed on this journey. Finally to the Bumpers College, for providing me with this life-changing opportunity. I love you all and hope to return the favor someday.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### *Need for the Study*

Since the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, the agricultural industry has significantly evolved (Doerfert, 2011). While the industrial revolution improved production efficiency, it, along with economic changes, has led to a dramatic decline in individuals directly involved in the field (Doerfert, 2011). Today's land-grant institution is challenged to reach these new and non-traditional audiences by redefining the agricultural field and diversifying programs (Baker, Abrams, Irani, & Meyers, 2011). In addition, the world is facing new and complex issues (National Academy of Sciences, 2009), and there is a need to produce highly educated and skilled graduates who are capable of identifying solutions to these challenges (Doerfert, 2011). The 2011-2015 *National Research Agenda* has emphasized this need as a research priority in the hopes of driving "...sustainable growth, scientific discovery, and innovation in public, private, and academic settings..." (Doerfert, 2011, p. 18).

Although there is a need for colleges and universities to produce agricultural scientists and professionals who meet industry demands (Doerfert, 2011), progress is dependent upon the generosity of external constituents to help provide opportunities to agricultural students. With both the decline of government appropriations and the general economic climate, public institutions depend on alumni donations for a considerable portion of their overall budget to keep education affordable for students (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Further complicating the issue, a land-grant university's fundamental product, education, is "largely intangible" (McAlexander, Koenig, & Schouten, 2006, p. 109). Land-grant university branding is used to give face to an institution and increase valued behaviors such as "donations, college referrals, engagement in

alumni groups, and participation in continuing education” (McAlexander et al., 2006, p. 115). Understanding and managing a university or college’s brand community can have a strong impact on advancement programs (McAlexander et al., 2006).

### ***Statement of the Problem***

Alumni are perceived by advancement programs as the most loyal supporters of an institution (Muller, 1986); however, these programs must keep alumni informed and involved with their alma mater to generate interest and investments over time (Webb, 1989). According to Weinreich (2010), “[t]he single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” (p.135). While alumni are significant contributors to funding public institutions, the total of alumni donors is decreasing (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Though research has been conducted to identify factors that impact alumni giving, it was not until recently researchers began considering generational differences in their analyses (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). In addition, history’s first “always connected” generation (Taylor & Keeter, 2010), Millennials, make up the smallest percentage of giving (Rovner, 2013). Although studies have suggested student loan debt may delay alumni giving (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009), a survey also revealed nonprofit practitioners did not see the value in prioritizing Millennials because they did not yield a great return on investment (Achieve & Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates [JGA], 2012). This stance is problematic as Millennial alumni are an alma mater’s most recent graduates and could provide an up-to-date assessment of an institution. Consistent communication and relationship cultivation with alumni is the backbone of the institution and is essential in keeping an alma mater from remaining an alumnus’ past (CASE, 2014a; CASE, 2014b).

### ***Purpose of the Study***

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine Millennial alumni perceptions of current print and electronic communications media utilized by the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College).

The researcher conducted a series of telephone interviews with inactive and active Millennial alumni to evaluate the success of media utilized by the Bumpers College Alumni Association from 2012 through 2014 to maintain relationships with the College's graduates. Select print communications media included *The Graduate* alumni magazine and the *AR Culture* student-written magazine. Digital communications media included (a) *The Graduate* e-newsletter, (b) email invitation to the *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*, (c) email invitation to the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*, (d) Bumpers College website, (e) Bumpers College alumni homepage, and (f) Bumpers College social media presences (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions were created based on the literature and guided this study.

1. What perceptions do Bumpers College Millennial alumni have regarding current electronic and print communications media utilized by the College?
2. What preferences of communication are held by Bumpers College Millennial alumni?
3. Would Bumpers College Millennial alumni prefer to donate funds, time, or services?



## ***Key Terms***

**Active Alumni** – alumni who have received a one-year complimentary Arkansas Alumni

Association membership after graduating or have paid their membership fee (T. Tucker, personal communication, December 20, 2013).

**Advancement** – the unit within higher education which serves as a communication link between

alumni and their alma mater and provides external and internal marketing, public relations, and fundraising (McAdoo, 2010; Muller, 1986).

**Alumni Association** – an organization whose purpose is to nurture the relationship between

alumni and their alma mater and may require a participation fee (Fisher, 1989; McAdoo, 2010).

**Alumni Experience** – alumni perceptions of their interactions with their alma mater after

graduation (Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007).

**Alumni Relations** – the practice of fostering and maintaining a relationship of mutual support

between alumni and their alma mater (McAdoo, 2010; Ransdell, 1986).

**Brand** – a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of these which builds an

organization's identity by communicating its services and setting it apart from competitors (Kotler, 1991).

**Brand Communities** – formed through social relationships amongst consumers of a common

brand, regardless of location, who acknowledge their overlapping interests and share traditions and a sense of duty related to the brand (McAlexander et al., 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

**Brand Loyalty** – a consumer's commitment to a specific brand (Chaudhur & Holbrook, 2001;

McAdoo, 2010).

**Dependability** – a goal sought by researchers to increase the reliability or the replicability of findings of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009).

**Confirmability** – a goal sought by researchers to increase the objectivity of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009).

**Credibility** – a goal sought by researchers to increase the internal validity or congruency of data gather in a qualitative study with reality (Merriam, 2009).

**Donation** – a gift in the form of funding, time, or services to an organization (Rovner, 2013).

**Inactive Alumni** – alumni who have discontinued their Arkansas Alumni Association membership or have allowed it to expire (T. Tucker, personal communication, December 20, 2013).

**Media / Medium** – mode of communication (visual, tactile, auditory, etc.) (Chandler, 2002).

**Millennials** – individuals of Generation Y born during 1981 or later (Rovner, 2013; Taylor & Keeter, 2010).

**Multichannel** – using numerous channels of communication to reach an audience (Rovner, 2013).

**Trustworthiness** – a quality of research that is not only valid and reliable but was conducted ethically (Merriam, 2009).

**Transferability** – a goal sought by researchers to increase the external validity or the generalizability of findings from a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009).

### ***Assumptions***

The following assumptions existed in this study:

1. The instrument used to collect Bumpers College Millennial alumni's perceptions was a reliable and valid form of measuring the success of current electronic and print communications media.
2. Bumpers College Millennial alumni were honest regarding perceptions of current electronic and print communications media utilized by Bumpers College during the telephone interview.
3. Bumpers College Millennial alumni responding to the survey did not allow personal biases to impact how they reported perceptions of current communications media utilized by the College.
4. Bumpers College Millennial alumni spent enough time reviewing print and electronic media to provide reliable feedback during their telephone interview.
5. Telephone interview recordings were accurately transcribed for analysis.

### ***Limitations***

This study was limited by the following ways:

1. The selected sample may not reflect the population of Bumpers College Millennial alumni.
2. The selected sample may not reflect the views of the Bumpers College Millennial alumni population.
3. Two participants were graduate students currently enrolled in master's programs in Bumpers College, and thus were connected to the College on a day-to-day basis.

4. Participants were provided the Bumpers College Facebook page for review and not the alumni page due to a hyperlink error on the Bumpers College Alumni webpage.
5. Bumpers College Millennial alumni may not have been forthcoming with his or her demographic information and perceptions of current electronic and print communications media utilized by Bumpers College when participating in the telephone interview.
6. Potential variability and reliability due to a human instrument being used to collect Bumpers College Millennial alumni demographics perceptions of current electronic and print communications media utilized by Bumpers College when participating in the telephone interview.
7. Given the unpredictable nature of technology, the following errors occurred causing inconsistencies in the viewing of electronic media:
  - Electronic media were misplaced by respondent and had to be resent during interview (IR3).
  - E-newsletter did not display correctly on cellphone and unaligned on desktop computer. Respondent's phone cut out briefly during a response (IR4).
  - Electronic media's images not showing up in email initially (AR7).
  - Mocktail party invitation would not appear during interview and had to be resent (AR12).
  - Electronic media not open during interview, and respondent was difficult to hear via telephone (IR16).
  - Images not showing up in e-newsletter initially and had to resent (AR17).
  - Alumni and university website not working when accessed (AR20).
8. Given the unpredictable nature of working with humans at a distance, the following errors occurred causing inconsistencies in the viewing of electronic media:
  - Print media delayed and received day of interview due to inclement weather (AR8).

- Respondent lost their print copy of the *AR Culture* magazine prior to the interview (IR11).
- Respondent arrived on-campus for face-to-face interview instead of the instructed telephone interview (AR19).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Land-grant History*

According to Abraham Lincoln, who signed the land-grant act of 1862 into law, “[t]he land-grant university system [was] being built on behalf of the people, who [had] invested in these public universities their hopes, their support, and their confidence” (Campbell, 1995, p. 18). The passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 into law served the public by making higher education more accessible to all American citizens and introduced practical skills in agriculture, military tactics, and mechanic arts to higher education (APLU, 2012). The law awarded 30,000 acres to each Representative and Senator per state and money accumulated through the sale of the land was to be invested in establishing and maintaining at least one college in each state and territory (Campbell, 1995). Additional sources of funding throughout the years included the Hatch Act of 1887, Morrill Act of 1890, and Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 (APLU, 2012). The agricultural experiment station program, key to the land-grant system, was introduced through the Hatch Act of 1887 and allowed direct payment of federal grant funds to each state to maintain these programs (APLU, 2012). Finally, in order for scientific information to be disseminated to the public, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 introduced the Cooperative Extension Service to the land-grant system and presented ongoing federal support for extension services (APLU, 2012).

#### *Changes in Agriculture*

Since the passage of the Smith-Lever Act, the agricultural industry has significantly evolved (Doerfert, 2011). While the industrial revolution transformed production agriculture by improving efficiency, it also decreased the number of individuals involved in the production

process (Doerfert, 2011). The industrial revolution, along with economic changes, has led to a dramatic decline in the number of individuals directly involved in the field (Doerfert, 2011). More Americans are becoming disconnected from agriculture with only 17% of Americans residing in rural areas and the remaining population living in urban and suburban areas of the country (USDA, 2011). According to the 2011-2015 *National Research Agenda*, “less than two percent of the U.S. population lives on a farm—a stark contrast to 30 percent in 1920 and 15 percent in 1950” (Doerfert, 2011, p. 11). With 98 percent of the U.S. population impacting the future of agriculture and possessing little understanding of the field, there is a need to improve the country’s agricultural literacy (Doerfert, 2011). Further complicating the matter, the world continues to rapidly evolve and introduce new and complex issues (National Academy of Sciences, 2009). These concerns include food security, soil conservation, and animal welfare (Birkenholz, 1990; Doerfert, 2011; Leising, Igo, Heald, Hubert, & Yamamoto, 1998).

Now more than ever, there is a need for colleges and universities to produce highly educated and skilled graduates capable of identifying solutions to global concerns (Doerfert, 2011). As the agricultural field diversifies, today’s land-grants are challenged to redefine themselves and better reach new and non-traditional audiences (Baker et al., 2011). Adjusting to the evolving agricultural industry, agricultural education programs have adapted curriculum objectives to prepare students for careers requiring agricultural knowledge rather than professions in production agriculture (Doerfert, 2011). Although the agricultural sector is the United States’ largest employer, employing 17% of the civilian workforce (USDA, n.d.), post-secondary institutions are currently not producing graduates to meet the demands in the agricultural industry (Robinson, Garton, & Terry, 2007). A report released by Purdue University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture expects

over 54,000 jobs to open annually between 2010 and 2015 within the agricultural sector (Goecker, Smith, Smith, & Goetz, 2010). Despite the overwhelming number of jobs available to post-secondary graduates, there is a talent deficiency for positions due to consolidated agricultural science programs caused by decreasing enrollment and funding (Doerfert, 2011). It is important for post-secondary institutions to collaborate and communicate with external constituents such as alumni and corporate stakeholders to ensure students are receiving an education that not only meets industry demands but helps develop students into professionals dedicated to identifying solutions to the complex challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Funding Higher Education***

Although there is a need to improve post-secondary education efforts to better address industry and global concerns, progress is dependent upon the generosity of external constituents to help provide funding and learning opportunities to agricultural students. Advancement programs seek to develop relationships with alumni, government leaders, and the community to secure financial and ideological support for post-secondary institutions (McAdoo, 2010; Trachtenberg, 2000). According to McAdoo (2010), “[a]lumni relations programs are a foundational component to institutional advancement and are often the unit that regularly communicates news and information about the institution to its alumni” (p. 3). Engagement channels that could be used to involve individuals in philanthropy include donating goods, volunteering, attending and/or hosting events, advocacy, participation in fundraising opportunities, and utilizing provided services (Rovner, 2013).

Because of a decline in both government appropriations and the general economic climate, many colleges and universities around the country are experiencing financial difficulties (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Because of this, advancement has become an essential role at



both public and private institutions (Kozobarich, 2000; McAdoo, 2010) to keep student expenses down (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). According to the Council for Aid to Education (2013), charitable contributions to post-secondary institutions grew by 0.2% in 2012 to \$31 billion, just below the historical high of \$31.6 billion in 2008. The average college and university funding from foundations increased by 5.5 percent and were responsible for backing 29.5 percent of the total funds in 2012 (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). While foundation support has increased, average alumni support decreased by 1.3 percent and supported 24.8 percent of the total funds in 2012 (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). Despite the drop, alumni showed a 10.8% increase in the average gift per alumnus for current operations (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). Though the amount of giving per alumnus increased last year, the actual number of alumni who contribute financially has continued to steadily decline since 1990 (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). With alumni being a significant contributor to funding and the total of alumni donors decreasing, it is important to research factors that influence alumni giving and use these findings to assist development officials in making adjustments (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009).

### ***Cultivating Alumni Relationships***

Advancement programs view alumni groups as the most loyal supporters of an institution (Muller, 1986). Alumni are unique in that they possess a lifelong relationship with a post-secondary institution and seek to maintain their alma mater's image to protect the value of their university degree (Webb, 1989). To develop committed alumni, alumni relations programs seek to keep alumni informed and involved with their alma mater to generate interest, which translates into investments over time (Webb, 1989). These investments include word-of-mouth marketing, benefitting from their skills and experience, mentorship roles, professional partnerships, and

fundraising prospects (Council for Advancement and Support of Education [CASE], 2014a). While these gifts keep institutions thriving, it is truly the cultivation process that serves as the backbone of the institution (CASE, 2014b). This process is unique to each alumnus and can take anywhere from a few days to years to nurture depending on the person (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Communication channels must be maintained to keep them updated on their alma mater's activities and progress as well as to prevent the institution from remaining solely their past (CASE, 2014a). If the alumni relations program has done a good job communicating, then all alumni are potential fundraising prospects (CASE, 2014a). This stage may be more successfully cultivated as the institution better understands the alumnus' past and current relationship with their alma mater and try to match their interest areas, affinity, or major with a need. After an alumnus makes a gift, however, the relationship does not end (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). The alumni relations maintain an infinite relationship with individual donors to communicate that their generous gift is valued through continuous stewardship (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Whether an alumnus remains a prospect or becomes a donor, alumni relations programs play a critical role in giving face to an institution and providing insight for identifying alumni preferences and needs and assessing the institution based on its quality of education (Miles & Miller, 2000).

### ***Influencing Giving***

Decades of research has revealed a variety of potential factors that impact alumni giving patterns (Havens, O'Herlihy, & Schervish, 2002). According to Havens et al. (2002), factors such as "higher income, higher wealth, greater religious participation, volunteerism, age, marriage, higher educational attainment, U.S. citizenship, higher proportion of earned wealth versus inherited wealth, and a greater level of financial security" were positively associated with

higher levels of giving (p. 9). Additional variables that impacted these factors included gender, ethnicity, and religion (Havens et al., 2002). Narrowing the scope, Connor (2005) identified influences on donor or non-donor status of alumni at Coastal Carolina University. Connor (2005) investigated five variables which included demographics, undergraduate involvement, alumni involvement, educational gains, and alumni loyalty. Those who had been involved as undergraduates, expressed feelings of loyalty, found value in their educational experience, graduated recently, and lived near their alma mater were more likely donors (Connor, 2005). Those identified as non-donors tended to live further away, donate to other charitable organizations, and graduated years earlier (Connor, 2005).

While the majority of variables impacting alumni giving cannot be controlled by institutions, other variables can. In his research regarding alumni giving to elite, private institutions, Clotfelter (2003) discovered a correlation between alumni's donations and their expressed satisfaction with their personal college experience. Specifically, students who had a person take interest in them during his or her collegiate career were twice as likely to be very satisfied with their experience and were linked to greater giving (Clotfelter, 2003). This relationship between alumni giving and collegiate satisfaction was further tested by McDearmon and Shirley (2009) through a survey conducted on young alumni at a land-grant university in the Midwest. In this study, researchers discovered data reinforcing conclusions made by Clotfelter (2003) (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). These studies suggested alumni relationships and cultivation must begin while they are students in the form of meaningful collegiate experiences (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009).

Seeking to create a model linking college experiences to alumni contribution, Mercatoris (2006) conducted focus groups with University of Texas alumni. Mercatoris (2006) identified 11

affinities related to alumni financial support of their alma mater. This research revealed those who contributed to an institution possessed affinities of relationships, academic life, university financial perceptions, degree of bonding with the institution, educational contact, and closing the deal (McAdoo, 2010; Mercatoris, 2006). In addition to this study, Dean (2007) surveyed chief development officers from 275 doctoral universities to seek a relationship between major alumni gifts and giving influences. This study revealed student experience factors such as satisfaction with the quality of faculty, positive peer relationships, and the overall influence of student experience were related to major gifts (McAdoo, 2010; Dean, 2007). These experiences remained meaningful for students after graduation and influenced their decision to support future students and give back to their alma mater as alumni. When alumni make a donation of time, talent, or funding to create valuable opportunities for students, it can be inferred that impacted students will in turn create opportunities for future students upon becoming alumni.

### ***The Millennial Generation***

Since it is important to create meaningful experiences and relationships for alumni while they are students, one would surmise that interacting with Millennial alumni could provide an up-to-date assessment of a college or university since they are the most recent graduates. While understanding Millennials is a hot topic for researchers, nonprofit organizations fail to see the value in research the youngest generation of donors. In a survey of nonprofit practitioners, researchers found nonprofits did not prioritize Millennials because they didn't believe it was worth the investment financially (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Looking at philanthropic reports, it would seem data supports this stance. In a study conducted by Blackbaud (Rovner, 2013), researchers identified key findings related to four specific generations and their giving trends: (a) Generation Y or Millennials; (b) Generation X; (c) Boomers; and (d) Matures. Matures, those

born 1945 and earlier, are currently the most generous of the four generations. Matures individually give and support a greater number of causes and as a whole make up 26% of total giving (Rovner, 2013). Boomers, those born between 1946 through 1964, make up 43% of all dollars donated and make up one-third of all adult donors (Rovner, 2013). Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, represent 20% of total giving in the U.S. (Rovner, 2013). The youngest generation, Generation Y, makes up the smallest percentage of giving (11%) but, on the other hand, are more likely to demand transparency and accountability of charities and nonprofit organizations before giving to a cause (Rovner, 2013). Other studies have suggested a delay in alumni giving may be caused by the student loan debt (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Students who have recently graduated from a college or university are more likely to face the additional expense of student loans.

While Millennials may not be providing an immediate return on investment, they have captured the attention of philanthropic organizations as they seek to understand the newest generation. Though the cutoff for the Millennial Generation continues to be adjusted, the label is typically given to individuals born during 1981 or later, or 33 and younger as of 2014 (Rovner, 2013; Taylor & Keeter, 2010). This generation is also called Generation “Me” because of their marked self-focus (Twenge, 2006). In fact, Twenge (2006) reports, “a careful study of news stories published or aired between 1980 and 1999 found a large increase in self-reference words (I, me, mine, and myself) and a marked decrease in collective words (humanity, country, or crowd)” (p. 51). Millennial adults make up roughly 25% of the United States’ population (United States Census Bureau, 2011) and are a highly individualized generation (Twenge, 2006). Despite their high level of self-interest, Millennials are more socially tolerant and possess a greater international outlook than older generations (Rovner, 2013). They are the most diverse

and educated generation in history (Rutgers, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010), and history's first "always connected" generation (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Millennials are the first generation to grow up with the Internet and are more open about their lives with others—even strangers (Twenge, 2006).

Technology and generational change are often linked, and this is certainly true for Millennials (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). A Pew Research Center telephone survey of generations revealed most Millennials believe their use of technology is what sets them apart from older generations (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). According to Taylor and Keeter (2010), "[i]t's not just their gadgets—it's the way they've fused their social lives into them" (p. 6). Millennials are more likely to say technology closely connects them to family and friends as well as makes life easier (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Eighty-three percent of Millennials sleep with their cell phone and three-quarters have created a profile on a social networking site (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). The likelihood of possessing a social networking profile amongst Millennials also increases if individuals have at least some college experience (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Millennials in general are more likely to visit the social networking site they use a minimum of once a day (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). This differs from older generations, with only 50 percent Generation Xers, 30 percent Boomers, and 6 percent Matures possessing a social networking profile (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). All older generations are more likely to visit once a week or less frequently (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). This survey also revealed 77% of Americans at least occasionally used email or the Internet with 90% of Millennials and 87% of Generation Xers admitting to this (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Television remains the main channel for all generations to receive news, but Internet closely trails for Millennials and Generation Xers (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). When respondents were asked what they had done in the past 24 hours, Millennials were more

likely than all other groups to have watched a video online and posted a message on social media, but they were the least likely of all other age groups to have watched over an hour of television and read a newspaper (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Understanding the tendencies of each generation to engage in specific communication channels can prove invaluable to advancement programs as they tailor messages to reach specific audiences.

### ***Technology and Millennial Expectations***

Multichannel communications is the new normal for all generations, but the ideal mix of channels is dependent on generation (Rovner, 2013). Although Millennials are still decades away from the donor marketplace, there is a need to begin building relationships now (Rovner, 2013). Generational use of communication channels in relation to charitable giving has been researched to help nonprofit organizations gain a better idea of Millennial channel preferences in relation to researching an organization and making a donation. According to *The Millennial Impact Report* (Achieve & JGA, 2012), 65% preferred websites, 55% of Millennials preferred to learn about nonprofits through social media, 47% preferred e-newsletters, 18% preferred print, and 17% would rather have face-to-face contact. “Technology has allowed Millennials to expect immediate and impulsive interactions with nonprofit organizations” (Achieve & JGA, 2012, p. 3). Contradicting the findings of *The Millennial Impact Report* (Achieve & JGA, 2012), CASE (2013) found that alumni magazines remain a staple in which alumni of all ages get information about their alma mater (CASE, 2013). Their study of alumni magazine readership also revealed that readers secondly prefer a combination of print and online communication to remain connected (CASE, 2013). Utilizing these channels, organizations must implement a unique strategy to meet the needs and interests of the Millennial generation.

Websites are the most preferred channel for Millennials to gain information about an organization and must act as a central hub (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Millennials will first visit a website to learn about a nonprofit but then stay updated through the organization's social networks (Achieve, 2013). As digital channels such as social media, email marketing, and mobile devices continue to grow, organizations must utilize concise messages through these channels to drive a targeted audience to the website (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Millennials want to be able to understand the organization's purpose, how they can help, and how their contribution specifically helps a cause (Achieve & JGA, 2012). When it comes to nonprofit websites, Millennials look for the "about us" information first when visiting a nonprofit website and make split-second judgments based on the professionalism and visual design of a nonprofit website (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Websites should include a unique, purposeful and concise mission, simple navigation, a clear call to action, and photos to illustrate the cause (Achieve & JGA, 2012).

To engage and communicate with supporters after the initial contact, e-newsletters continue to be a preferred method to connect with nonprofits (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Millennials favored to receive news and information about events in their email than any other content (Achieve & JGA, 2012). E-newsletters should contain one main story and call to action, links to read more, compelling visuals, and a list of events and volunteer opportunities (Achieve & JGA, 2012). If emails do not have a convincing subject line or are sent too frequently, they will more than likely be deleted and never opened (Achieve & JGA, 2012).

Finally, Millennials also prefer to use social media to connect with and promote nonprofits (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Though social media is a key channel for Millennials, each network is unique and demands a dedicated strategy (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Additionally,



technology is ever-changing and nonprofits must be selective in which social media trends to invest in for reaching targeted audiences (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Social media allows Millennials to take part in micro-volunteering by sharing, signing petitions, and other forms of supportive activism (Achieve, 2013). This channel also provides instant feedback for organizations as they can easily monitor whether or not a message is resonating with Millennials by looking at its number of shares, likes, and retweets (Achieve, 2013). When they do share information, it is typically related to a cause rather than the organization itself (Achieve, 2013). Millennials are highly selective in the nonprofits they connect with through social media as nearly half of respondents follow only one to five nonprofits (Achieve, 2013). Social media pet peeves of Millennials include organizations constantly asking for help or money and repeatedly seeing the same posts (Achieve, 2013). They do like, however, when organizations provide information associated to the broader issue and share success stories (Achieve, 2013). In sharing this information, Millennials feel more like collaborators and less like an ATM (Achieve, 2013).

Facebook is the most popular social networking site utilized by Millennials to connect with nonprofits (Achieve & JGA, 2012). “Of the 67% of respondents who said they have interacted with nonprofits via Facebook, 92% have “liked” nonprofit pages, 71% have joined a Facebook Group, and 74% have “liked” a post on a nonprofit’s Facebook page (Achieve & JGA, 2012, p. 11). Once a relationship is established, Millennials are likely to share updates and information about the cause rather than the organization itself (Achieve, 2013). Millennials will also interact with nonprofit organizations on Twitter by following, tweeting compliments, retweeting, and hashtagging (Achieve & JGA, 2012).

### ***What Makes Millennials Give?***

With the perceived generation gap ever-widening because of technology (Taylor & Keeter, 2010), land-grants across the nation are seeking to answer the question, “[W]hat makes recent college graduates decide to start making financial contributions in the first place[?]” (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009, p. 84). Most nonprofits know how to capture the attention of Millennials by communicating through relevant, integrated digital channels (Achieve, 2013). “But these channels are simply that—channels. The real draw for Millennials, especially in today’s attention-fragmented media landscape, is a compelling message that inspires them toward impulsive sharing and contributing. Moreover, these messages need to maintain ‘real time relevance’...” (Achieve, 2013, p. 10). In *The 2013 Millennial Impact Report*, Achieve’s (2013) primary takeaway was Millennials tend to support causes they are passionate about and not institutions. Organizations must work to inspire Millennials and illustrate the tangible difference their support can make (Achieve, 2013; Achieve & JGA, 2012). Nonprofit organizations are encouraged to engage with Millennials through inspiration, monthly giving, transparency, and peer-to-peer engagement to build a giving relationship (Achieve, 2013). When it comes to making a difference, Millennials are more likely to be initially generous with their time (Achieve & JGA, 2012; Rovner, 2013). Millennials who take part in volunteer opportunities are also more likely to make donations and tend to recruit family and friends (Achieve & JGA, 2012; Rovner, 2013). In making financial contributions, Millennials typically donate \$100 or less per organization and have been known to give “in the moment” (Achieve & JGA, 2012, p. 4).

### ***The University of Arkansas and Arkansas Alumni Association***

Founded in 1871, the University of Arkansas (U of A) serves as Arkansas's land-grant and state university (McAdoo, 2010; U of A, n.d.). As of fall 2013, the University had 25,365 students enrolled with a 4% enrollment increase since fall 2012 (Bartholomew, 2013). The University utilizes the Arkansas Alumni Association [AAA], established in 1878, to connect with students upon graduation (AAA, n.d.). Since its existence, records have been kept on U of A alumni (King, 2003a). This organization plays a key role in contributing to the University through campus growth, gathering financial support, creating scholarships, and arranging alumni programs (AAA, n.d.). During the 1980s, the AAA established the Office of Development to take on the responsibility of fundraising for the University (King, 2003b). At that time, the Association was limited to communicating with alumni through alumni chapters and reunion events as well as the University's alumni magazine (McAdoo, 2010). Today, the Association has widened its scope of programs to reach all ages and locations and is typically centered on group organizations and rallying behind causes or athletics (McAdoo, 2010). These programs include the Student Alumni Board, Arkansas Alumni Chapters, Regional Razorback, pre-game rallies, and road trips (McAdoo, 2010). Alumni may also participate in engagement opportunities which include volunteering, career services, traveling, becoming an alumni ambassador, and joining the Legislative Advocacy Network (McAdoo, 2010). Alumni may learn about these opportunities through the Association's electronic newsletter *@Arkansas* or the *Arkansas* magazine which are exclusively sent to dues paying members (McAdoo, 2010).

In 2009, the Alumni Attitude Survey© conducted a mail (digital or print) survey for the AAA of alumni attitudes and compared results to those of U.S. institutions that resembled the population and demographics of U of A alumni (Performance Enhancement Group, Ltd. [PEG,

Ltd.], 2009). When alumni were asked about what motivates them to continue subscribing as a member of the AAA, most participants cited “Staying connected to the university” as important to their decision (PEG, Ltd., 2009, p. 23). Other reasons in order from greatest to least included “Receiving the alumni magazine,” “Knowing that the alumni association provides financial support for student activities,” “Giving back to the university,” and “Receiving the alumni newsletters” (PEG, Ltd., 2009, p. 23). Factors who had some impact on alumni’s decision to discontinue their AAA membership included not using their benefits and a change in personal circumstances (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Finally, those that never became members found their distance from campus and personal circumstances most likely impacted their decision (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Findings related to the relationship between distances and giving are supported by Connor (2005) whose data was previously mentioned.

Specifically looking at communications utilized by the AAA, alumni most often engaged in reading the University’s alumni magazine than any other channel. Alumni found the alumni magazine to be a very important communication channel with the Association exceeding a “good” rating in its performance (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Following the magazine in importance included email and the University’s website with ratings just below “good” but well above “fair” (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Alumni noted online networking and viral videos as the least important communication channel and listed it below “somewhat important” (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Overall, most channels were viewed as performing beyond its importance to alumni (PEG, Ltd., 2009). These findings matched those of institutions with alumni characteristics similar to those found at the U of A (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Regarding the frequency of channels of communication, most alumni found invitations to alumni activities, printed materials, and email correspondence was “about right” (PEG, Ltd., 2009). In contrast, alumni were more likely to note solicitations for

donations and information regarding programs including credit cards and insurance services as used “a little too much” or “way too much” but still predominately felt the frequency was “about right” (PEG, Ltd., 2009).

Regarding alumni loyalty, the Alumni Attitude Survey© study found most alumni identified themselves as ‘loyal’ to the U of A in general (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Following in loyalty from greatest to least included an alumnus’ major, undergraduate college, University athletics, a faculty member or instructor, and a student organization or activity (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Sixty percent of respondents believed their decision to attend the University was a “great decision,” and 50% believed their student experience was “excellent” (PEG, Ltd., 2009, p 47-48).

Looking at all of the results from the Alumni Attitude Survey© study, the following implications or areas of focus were highlighted (PEG, Ltd., 2009). There is a need for the Association to communicate how the diploma is increasing in equity (PEG, Ltd., 2009). In addition, the Association must provide opportunities for alumni engagement and to provide feedback to the University (PEG, Ltd., 2009). The University must provide career related activities as well as communicate differently with young alumni or those 30 years of age or younger (PEG, Ltd., 2009). Finally, a branding presence on campus is important as well as engaging with alumni who live out-of-state are both important (PEG, Ltd., 2009).

Further analyzing data obtained through the Alumni Attitude Study©, McAdoo (2010) investigated factors that affected alumni’s institutional perception of the U of A. McAdoo (2010) found although territory did impact alumni membership, there was no significant difference between geography and the factors that impact the formation of alumni’s opinion of the U of A. From this finding, McAdoo (2010) urged for alumni relations and communications professionals to communicate a consistent message across territories. In these messages, alumni

relations and communication professionals should emphasize the University's history and tradition as it was the most powerful factor on an alumni's opinion (McAdoo, 2010). Other factors that had a significant relationship on the formation of alumni opinion included athletic teams, campus aesthetics, and alumni accomplishments (McAdoo, 2010). He also stressed that while alumni were found to be very loyal, there was a need to reinforce the general University's brand as well as study the relationship between loyalty and an alumnus' major and program (McAdoo, 2010).

### ***Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences Alumni Society***

Chartered by the Arkansas Alumni Association, the Bumpers College Alumni Society was founded in 1995 by alumni and friends of the College (AAA, 2006). The Society functions under the structure and regulations of the AAA and aims to foster communication and friendship among alumni, faculty, and friends of Bumpers College (AAA, 2006). Alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the College as well as employees of the Cooperative Extension Service are eligible to join the Society upon paid membership with the AAA (AAA, 2006). This membership provides additional benefits to the AAA membership including special Bumpers College print and digital communications, the opportunity to network with other alumni and friends of the College, student recruitment opportunities, sponsor programs, and invitations to College events. As of 2014, no formal studies have been conducted on communications with Bumpers College alumni since their formation (T. Tucker & T. Holman, personal communication, May 1, 2014).

### ***Theoretical and Conceptual Framework***

“Present alumni work is a precursor to development activity where financial support is solicited” (McAdoo, 2010, p. 85). To help development gain financial support, alumni programs first aim to inform and involve alumni (McAdoo, 2010). Although communication is an

everyday activity, its significance, complexity, and influence is at times overlooked (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Shannon and Weaver, concerned with the causes of communication breakdowns, created the Shannon and Weaver Model in 1949 (Bettinghaus, 2004). Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of how a message is communicated to a receiver. A message is first produced by an information source and is sent through a transmitter, which alters the message in order to make it suitable for a particular channel (Bettinghaus, 2004). A channel or medium is used to send the signal from the transmitter to the receiver (Bettinghaus, 2004). When the receiver receives the message from the signal, the receiver reconstructs the message, and the message reaches its destination (Bettinghaus, 2004). Although the transmitter has control over how the message is encoded for the channel, this does not ensure that the message reaches the receiver in the desired fashion. Noise can enter the communication system and alter the reception of the message (Bettinghaus, 2004).

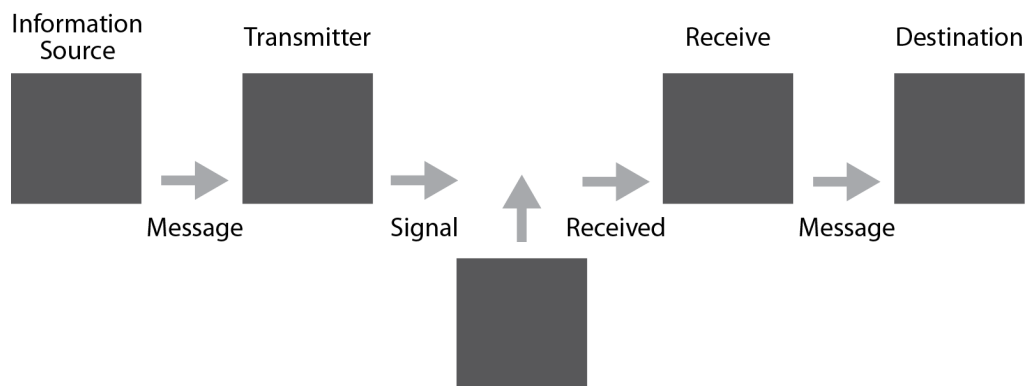


Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver Model (1949)

To further illustrate the significance and influence of the communication process, Berlo's Source-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) Model of Communication (1963) (Figure 2) was also considered as an expansion of Shannon and Weaver's (1948) model of linear

communication. In each stage of the communication process, special care should be given to shape the way a message is interpreted and impact the attitudes of the receiver. According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), attitudes are “general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects, and issues” (p. 127). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to define the principles that affect the formation of attitudes in persuasive communication. This theory maintains there is a central and peripheral route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

When individuals lack information to form an opinion on new technology, they cannot or will not make decisions based on information presented (Miller et al., 2003). Instead, consumers will rely on peripheral cues to help form an attitude. If the message is not properly encoded or communicated in the content, the receiver will rely on other aspects including the message’s elements, treatment, structure, and code to form a positive or negative perception. As emphasized in previous studies (AAA, 2009; McAdoo, 2010; McAlexander et al., 2006), branding a university or college’s messaging and communication can increase valued behaviors including “donations, college referrals, engagement in alumni groups, and participation in continuing education” (McAlexander et al., 2006, p. 115). It is essential for alumni relations programs to make sure the proper messages are being communicated through appropriate channels to strengthen and maintain relationships with alumni across the world.



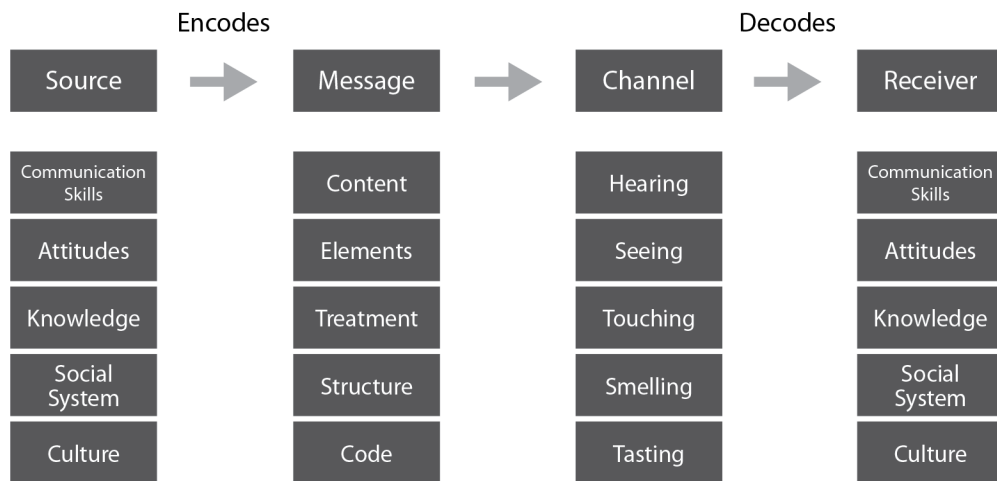


Figure 2. Berlo's (1960) Source-Message-Channel-Receiver Model of Communication

### ***Brand Community***

A university or college is a marketing institution that offers a wide range of services to a spectrum of consumers through its brand (McAlexander et al., 2006). Although education's product is largely an intangible product, the strength of a university's brand relationship with consumers is visible in the frequency in which consumers adorn themselves and their spaces with branded merchandise (McAlexander et al., 2006). Consumers who invest in a common brand form a brand community (McAlexander et al., 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). As cited by McAlexander et al. (2006), a brand community is formed through social relationships amongst consumers of a common brand, regardless of location, who acknowledge their commonness and share traditions and a sense of duty related to the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). A university or college's brand community not only includes alumni but parents, prospective students, businesses, fans of the institution's athletic teams, and people or organizations who engage with a university (McAlexander et al., 2006). While all consumers may support a common brand or

educational institution, it is the relationships among the brand's consumers that are more important than any other customer relationship in maintaining a brand community (McAlexander et al., 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). A comprehensive model of brand community was conceptualized and empirically tested by McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002). They characterized a brand community as "...a web of relationships that connect customers to a brand and, under its umbrella, to its products and services, its associated institution, and its other customers..." (McAlexander et al., 2006, p. 108). A model of their brand community can be found in Figure 3.

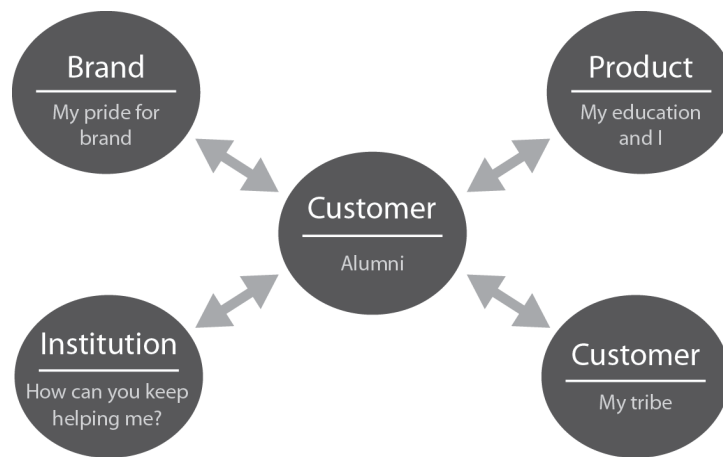


Figure 3. Adapted version of The Brand Community Model by McAlexander et al. (2006)

The model developed by McAlexander et al. (2006) is a revised version of *Traditional Model of Customer–Brand Relationship* and the Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) *Brand Community Triad* models. In the traditional model (Figure 4), only the relationship between the customer and brand is represented. This “consumption community” is created and maintained by consumer investments with a brand (McAlexander et al., 2002). Beyond this dual relationship, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) recognized another layer in this connection. Rather than a dialog between two entities, a *Brand Community Triad* (Figure 5) is shaped with a specific brand and its

consumers. This triad stresses the relationships formed between consumers of the same brand, regardless of location, are equally important to a consumer's bond with a specific brand in maintaining this community.



Figure 4. Traditional Model of Customer-Brand Relationship by McAlexander et al. (2006)

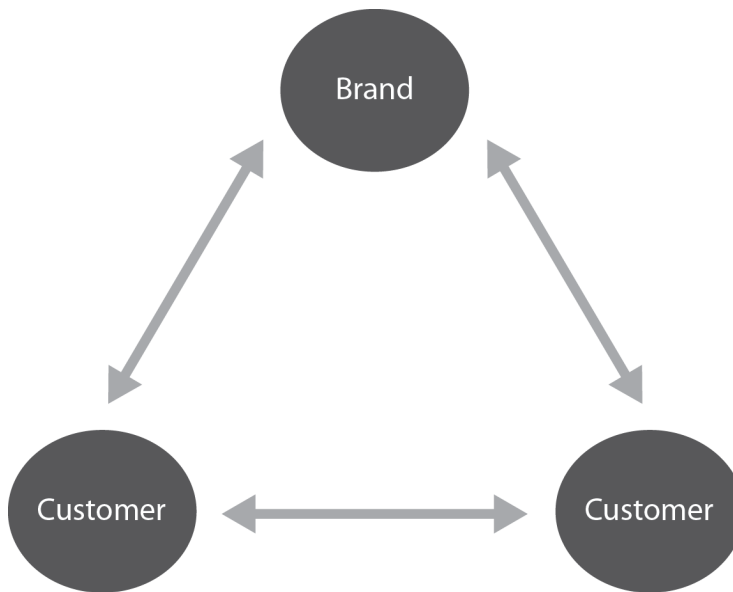


Figure 5. Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) Brand Community Triad

While McAlexander et al. (2002) did recognize inter-consumer relationships as important to a brand community, they also identified other entities and relationships that are just as essential to a brand community (Figure 3). Institutions must be aware and attend to the wide range of relationships consumers form with peers, brand, the institution, and its product (McAlexander & Koenig, 2010). “We take the perspective that brand community is customer-

centric, that the existence and meaningfulness of the community inhere in customer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience revolves” (McAlexander et al., 2002, p. 39). In higher education, consumer or alumni relationships include: (a) alumni-product, my education and I, (b) alumni-brand, my pride for brand, (c) alumni-institution, How can you continue to help me?, and (d) alumni-alumni, my tribe (McAlexander et al., 2006). The alumni-product relationship is one of the most meaningful relationships an individual can have because the product or education helps shape the consumer’s identity (Belk, 1988). This relationship is first started as a student as they build a relationship with the institution through transactional interactions during their scholastic career (McAlexander et al., 2006). An alumni-institution is formed following graduation, and feelings formed as a student can be damaged or improved through interpersonal relationships with alumni relations (McAlexander et al., 2006). It is said this relationship can benefit most from the laws of reciprocity in which the consumer desires to return a gesture of goodwill after being treated beyond expectations (McAlexander et al., 2006; Sherry, 1983). An alumni-brand relationship is also a core concern for marketers of an institution in building a consistent message and an emotional connection with consumers (McAlexander et al., 2006). Understanding an institution’s personality or identity can help strengthen a customer’s sense of pride for their alma mater and ultimately strengthen the alumni-brand relationship (McAlexander et al., 2006). This shared pride or experience builds the alumni-alumni relationship (McAlexander et al., 2006). Alumni-alumni relationships are the most important bond in maintaining a brand community (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) and impact buyer behaviors through their communications (McAlexander et al., 2006).

## *Summary*

The Morrill Act of 1862 was passed with the intention of making higher education and practical skills accessible to all American citizens (APLU, 2012). As the agricultural field and its learners diversify (Doerfert, 2011), land-grants are evolving to reach new and non-traditional audiences (Baker et al., 2011) to maintain this tradition. With the global population projected to grow to nine billion by 2050, it's become increasingly vital for colleges and universities to produce graduates who can meet these challenges facing the agricultural workforce (Doerfert, 2011). Although careers in agriculture are plentiful, universities dropping or consolidating programs due to a decline in enrollment and funding has caused a talent deficiency (Doerfert, 2011). Along with the pressure on higher education to meet industry demands (Doerfert, 2011), land-grant institutions have recently faced financial difficulties to a decline in both government appropriations and the general economic climate (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009).

Advancement programs have become essential at both public and private institutions (Kozobarich, 2000; McAdoo, 2010) to keep student expenses down (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009) and improve enrollment. While advancement programs view alumni as the institution's most loyal supporters (Muller, 1986), less alumni are making donations (Council for Aid to Education, 2013). This is problematic because, unlike other supporters, alumni are unique in that the degree received from their alma mater forever ties them to the institution (Webb, 1989). Studies have linked positive experiences and affinities developed as students to future alumni generosity (Clotfelter, 2003; Dean, 2007; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Mercatoris, 2006). From these findings, it can be inferred when alumni make a donation of time, talent, or funding to create valuable opportunities for students, impacted students will in turn create opportunities for future students upon becoming alumni.

While factors related to alumni giving have been researched, generational differences in giving have only been recently considered in analyses (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Though the Millennial generation is the most diverse and educated generation in history (Rutgers, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010), they are also the least generous (Rovner, 2013). In addition, nonprofit practitioners do not see the value in prioritizing engagement with Millennials (Achieve, JGA, 2012). Although Millennials may not currently be members of the donor marketplace, there is a need to begin building relationships now (Rovner, 2013). Millennials tend to support causes they are passionate about and not institutions (Achieve, 2013). Establishing a relationship with Millennials now will not only foster loyalty or passion but also provide a current assessment of the institution's quality.

To maintain this cycle and generate future investments, alumni relations programs must keep alumni informed and involved with their alma mater (Webb, 1989). This relationship helps provide institutions insight regarding alumni preferences and needs as well as assessing its quality of education (Miles & Miller, 2000). While communication is a normal activity, its complexity can be taken for granted (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Not only can noise interfere with an intended message (Bettinghaus, 2004), but failing to present content clearly will cause receivers to use peripheral cues to form their own attitude (Miller et al., 2003). In addition, communicating a consistent brand is important to give face to an institution and builds alumni engagement and communities (McAlexander et al., 2006). With an institution's alumni residing all over the world, it is essential for alumni relations to continuously evaluate the channels and messages being communicated to alumni through media.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Restatement of the Problem*

Alumni are perceived by advancement programs as the most loyal supporters of an institution (Muller, 1986); however, these programs must keep alumni informed and involved with their alma mater to generate interest and investments over time (Webb, 1989). According to Weinreich (2010), “[t]he single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” (p. 135). While alumni are significant contributors to funding public institutions, the total of alumni donors is decreasing (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Though research has been conducted to identify factors that impact alumni giving, it was not until recently researchers began considering generational differences in their analyses (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). In addition, history’s first “always connected” generation (Taylor & Keeter, 2010, p. 1), Millennials, make up the smallest percentage of giving (Rovner, 2013). Although studies have suggested student loan debt may delay alumni giving (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009), a survey also revealed nonprofit practitioners did not see the value in prioritizing Millennials because they did not yield a great return on investment (Achieve & JGA, 2012). This stance is problematic as Millennial alumni are an alma mater’s most recent graduates and could provide an up-to-date assessment of an institution. Consistent communication and relationship cultivation with alumni is the backbone of the institution and is essential in keeping an alma mater from remaining an alumnus’ past (CASE, 2014a; CASE, 2014b).

### ***Restatement of the Purpose of the Study***

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine Millennial alumni perceptions of current print and electronic communications media utilized by the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College).

The researcher conducted a series of telephone interviews with inactive and active Millennial alumni to evaluate the success of media utilized by the Bumpers College Alumni Association from 2012 through 2014 to maintain relationships with the College's graduates. Select print communications media included *The Graduate* alumni magazine and the *AR Culture* student-written magazine. Digital communications media included (a) *The Graduate* e-newsletter, (b) email invitation to the *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*, (c) email invitation to the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*, (d) Bumpers College website, (e) Bumpers College alumni homepage, and (f) Bumpers College social media presences (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).

### ***Restatement of Research Questions***

The following research questions were created based on the literature and guided this study.

1. What perceptions do Bumpers College Millennial alumni have regarding current electronic and print communications media utilized by the College?
2. What preferences of communication are held by Bumpers College Millennial alumni?
3. Would Bumpers College Millennial alumni prefer to donate funds, time, or services?

### ***Design of the Study***

This study followed a qualitative research design that consisted of a series of telephone interviews to gather thick, rich data for interpretation of results. Telephone interviews were used



to record perceptions of Bumpers College Millennial alumni regarding print and digital communication pieces utilized by the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences (Bumpers College) in the past two years. This time span was selected to assess communication pieces utilized before and after the introduction of a Director of Development, Director of Communications, and Communications Graduate Assistant to the Bumpers College. These pieces were then narrowed down to only include a sample of communications media typically targeted toward Millennial alumni.

According to Creswell (1999), a qualitative study allows researchers the opportunity to attempt to explain the “how” or “what” of the topic in a detailed view. Researchers not only sought to identify if print and electronic media reached a small sample of Millennial alumni but aimed to pinpoint Millennial alumni preferences, such as what they expected to receive from their alma mater, how they would like to receive it, and how current communication methods could be improved. This method was ultimately used to explain and gauge the success of Bumpers College communication efforts in reaching the youngest generation of alumni. Key communication pieces utilized for reaching Millennial alumni were identified by Ms. Trina Holman, the Bumpers College liaison for alumni, development, and recruiting, Mr. Robby Edwards Jr., the Bumpers College director of communications, and Ms. Amanda Northfell, the Bumpers College communications graduate assistant (personal communication, February 11, 2014). Select print communications media included (a) *The Graduate* alumni magazine, (b) *AR Culture* student-written magazine (designed prior to administrative additions), (c) *The Graduate* e-newsletter, (d) email invitation to the *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*, (e) email invitation to the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*, (f) Bumpers College website (designed prior to administrative additions), (g) Bumpers College alumni homepage (designed

prior to administrative additions), and (h) Bumpers College social media presences (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).

These creative pieces were designed to target all generations of alumni but distributed according to individual interests and their following activity in the Bumpers College Alumni Society. *The Graduate* magazine is distributed to all Bumpers College graduates with addresses listed in the AAA database as well as on display on campus throughout Bumpers College departments, while the electronic version is sent to all Bumpers College graduates with email addresses in the AAA database (T. Tucker, personal communication, May 1, 2014). The *AR Culture* magazine in contrast is targeted toward prospective, current, and past students of the Bumpers College. It is available on campus and is sent to 1,000 potential alumni donors (L. Edgar, personal communication, May 1, 2014). Digital invitations to the annual tailgate were sent to all active and inactive alumni with a valid email address (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Finally, the invitation to the mocktail party was targeted by the Bumpers College toward active alumni living in Benton or Washington County (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). From this list, those who had recently been in contact with the College were provided a handwritten note by a Bumpers College student ambassador to increase their likelihood of participation (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). Finally, Bumpers College website and social media presences are advertised in both the print and electronic edition of *The Graduate* and online hyperlinks. There are currently no existing communications media or event that is solely targeted towards Millennial Bumpers College alumni (T. Holman & R. Edwards, personal communication, February 11, 2014). Those with invalid email and mailing addresses within the AAA's database may not have received these media prior to this study.

## ***Subjects***

All research involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before researchers may begin their studies. This requirement is mandatory under the University of Arkansas policies and federal regulations. Before participating in this study, participants were initially contacted by the researcher's thesis chair, Dr. Leslie Edgar, to confirm their willingness to participate in the study and add to the study's credibility. The time of initial contact was dependent upon Dr. Edgar's schedule and typically occurred in the morning. If participants lacked a valid telephone number in the AAA database, did not possess a voicemail, or calling conflicted with Dr. Edgar's schedule, Ms. Northfell emailed participants as an initial contact. To ensure subjects had freely chosen to participate in a telephone interview, participant consent was confirmed when subjects agreed through an email or telephone response. Correspondence with participants during the initial telephone, initial and follow-up email, and telephone interview followed a specific script developed. A sample script developed by Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) (2009) was used as a template and its content and structure were adapted by Ms. Northfell. The IRB approved all data collection materials including the initial contact telephone and email scripts, email follow-up script, and interviewer guide prior to conducting telephone interviews.

## ***Sample***

Participants for this study were identified using the University's alumni database maintained by the AAA and shared with the Bumpers College. From the general AAA alumni database, subjects were extracted and supplied by Ms. Tammy Tucker, AAA director of communications and marketing, based on the following sampling frame: (a) obtained bachelor's degree from Bumpers College and (b) current age of 32 and younger. This query produced 1,134

male or female subjects labeled as active or inactive alumni and living in-state, out-of-state, or out-of-country and provided 418 active and 704 inactive prospective alumni (sample).

From the list of subjects (labeled one through 1,134), a stratified random sample was used to identify prospective study participants. Because “there are no rules for sample size,” in qualitative research, researchers established a baseline of 20 alumni (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). This size was rationalized by researchers to more easily recreate the six to four, female to male, gender population ratio of the Bumpers College as of 2013. Using this sample size as a strategic starting point for data collection, researchers began contacting participants with the intention to increase the sample size if responses did not appear to be saturated (Merriam, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Looking at the numeric list, the researcher highlighted all listed numbers with repeated numerals except for 0 (ex: 44, 444, 844, 1444), and yielded a sample of 102 potential participants. From this sample, each individual from the list was contacted until researchers obtained 10 active alumni (four males and six females) and 10 inactive alumni (four males and six females) or 20 confirmed participants willing to be interviewed ( $N = 20$ ). Researchers were unable to achieve 10 active alumni participants from the first random sample, so a second stratified random sample was pulled using multiples of five and yielded 226 additional prospective active alumni participants. Active alumni from the sample list were contacted until researchers obtained 10 confirmed participants.

With the goal of redundancy in data, researchers found that a sample size of 20 did sufficiently yield saturated or repetitive data. Inactive alumni were more likely to confirm their participation with 58 inactive alumni (50 women, eight men) contacted before reaching 10 participants. In contrast, 73 active alumni (57 women, 16 men) were contacted before four men

and six women committed to participating in the study. Six active alumni confirmed participation over telephone and five via online with one alternate participant. Seven inactive alumni agreed to participate via telephone and six online with two alternate participants. One active and one inactive confirmed participant dropped out of the study ignoring researcher correspondence emails and phone calls.

Of those who did not participate in the study, two alumni, one active and one inactive, said that they would participate, but did not agree to the methods outlined in the study. Only five active alumni out of all contacted alumni said they would not like to participate in the study via telephone. All other contacted alumni did not respond to their voicemail or email and were interpreted as an implied no. Twenty contacted alumni had an invalid phone number ( $n_1 = 9$ ,  $n_2 = 11$ ), and 21 alumni had an invalid email address ( $n_1 = 10$ ,  $n_2 = 11$ ). Only two alumni, one inactive and one active, had both an invalid phone number and email address listed by the AAA. All but one interview took place via telephone. One participant, despite instructions, appeared for a face-to-face interview.

While a small sample size exposes the threat of bias to the study's generalizability, this sampling method was necessary to ensure the validity of the data obtained from this study. By studying a small sample of Bumpers College Millennial alumni, researchers sought to increase close association with respondents and thick description of the data obtained during participant interviews. Stratified random sampling was used to increase the transferability, credibility, and overall trustworthiness of the study by selecting a representative sample of the College's Millennial alumni population. Selection criteria including a six to four gender ratio to reflect the most current gender makeup of the College, equal numbers of active and inactive alumni to equally represent and compare the two alumni classifications, a 32 or younger age range to

ensure the selection of Millennials, and undergraduate alumnus status to represent the majority of Bumpers College alumni were used to provide researchers with the broadest range of data based on relevancy to the College's current demographics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While data collected on the perceptions of this sample cannot be generalized to the entire generational population, it does provide valuable insight as to whether the College's Millennial alumni are being successfully and effectively reached by the alma mater. The data gathered will help the College holistically evaluate their most recent efforts and make adjustments in building future relationships with young alumni.

### ***Instrumentation Development***

Before conducting telephone interviews, participants were contacted by the graduate student's research advisor to verify their involvement, confirm the credibility of the study to participants, and increase the response rate of interviews. According to Krueger (1988), a moderator for focus groups must be a great listener, and know when to move on to the next question. While focus groups were unable to be conducted for this study due to a low response rate from alumni ( $n = 3$ ), these qualities were still considered when preparing the interviewer. The lead in this study, the graduate student researcher interviewer, was selected to interview participants. At each interview session, the interviewer used a print out of the interview protocol and two audio recorders (Olympus Digital Voice Recorder and Audio Memos iPad app) to record participant responses for each interview conversation. Notes and participant responses were taken on the printed interview protocol as well as the researcher's personal thoughts (Creswell, 2009).

During each interview, participants were led through a semi-structured series of open-ended questions regarding specific communications media utilized by the College. Interviews

were neo-positive in nature as the interviewer aimed to ask good questions, minimize bias through neutrality in position, and generate quality data and valid findings (Roulston, 2007 as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 92). In addition, the interviewer sought to "...engage [the participant] in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (DeMarrais, 2004, p. 55 as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 87). While the interviewer intended to stimulate conversation, a semi-structured interview was used to improve the consistency in which data was collected (Merriam, 2009). This structure included a flexible mix of structured and less structured questions with no predetermined wording or order, aimed to guide the interviewer (Merriam, 2009). Interview questions were designed as open-ended and little in number to evoke participant views and opinions as suggested by Creswell (2009). Questions along with the interview structure were designed based on Kruger's (1988) guide for designing interviews as well as Creswell's (2009) interview protocol, including the following components:

- A heading (date, place, interviewer, interviewee)
- Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interviewer to another
- The questions (typically an ice-breaker question at the beginning) followed by 4-5 questions that are often the sub-questions in a qualitative research plan, followed by some concluding statement or a question, such as, "Who should I visit with to learn more about my questions?"
- Probes for the 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said
- Space between the questions to record responses

- A final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview (p. 183).

### ***Credibility and Transferability***

Two months prior to conducting the first telephone interview, the study's interviewer shared the interview protocol with a panel of experts in the form of a master's committee to test its credibility. The interviewer presented the study's research objectives to the panel of experts along with the interview protocol used to guide the researcher in collecting data for each interview session. Committee members shared their suggestions and the researcher made adjustments to the protocol before commencing interviews. The final copy of the protocol used can be found in Appendix I. This protocol not only included a list of questions and cues for the interviewer but also comprised of an introduction which mentioned interviewer's motives, a promise of confidentiality, a statement about the structure and length of the interview (Merriam, 2009), and brief overview regarding the terminology used in the interview. Minor revisions, such as the omission of questions, were made to the protocol during each interview to avoid redundancies and simplistic responses from participants.

Researchers also sought to increase the credibility of the study by implementing four additional methods. Credibility is sought by researchers to increase the congruency of data gather in a qualitative study with reality (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation was implemented as the interviewer used various modes to record data including note taking during the interview and listening to two audio recordings weeks after the interview was completed, each with differing audio quality. Each data source was compared and cross-checked to increase researcher accuracy during transcription (Merriam, 2009). In addition, member checks were used throughout the interview to validate interviewer's understanding and prevent the possibility of



misinterpretation participant responses (Merriam, 2009). Peer debriefing between the researcher and master's committee chair was also used to reinforce the data's accuracy (Creswell, 2009). Finally, rich, thick description was used to report the study's findings by incorporating respondent quotes to support themes identified with each communications media (Creswell, 2009).

A weakness in the study is its lack of transferability or the findings' ability to be generalized to the larger Bumpers College Millennial alumni population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is due to its criterion-based sampling and small sample size. Unlike quantitative studies, however qualitative studies do not seek generalizability but applicability to another setting (Merriam, 2009). Transferability was increased through rich, thick description so that individuals in a similar context may draw similarities to the study and their personal situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

### ***Reflexivity Statement***

Working within the realm of qualitative research, as the primary researcher and thesis candidate, I, Amanda Northfell, understand that I may carry biases, dispositions, and assumptions from personal experiences related to the topic of this study (Merriam, 2009). By reporting my experiences, I hope to increase credibility as a researcher and "human instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). Throughout the study, I continued to reflect on my role as a researcher to avert personal biases from influencing study findings.

Born in 1989, I am classified as a member of the Millennial generation, which was researched in this thesis study. Graduating from the J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences in the fall of 2011, I am an alumna of the U of A and currently labeled as an inactive alumna by the AAA. As an undergraduate, I was assisted by the U of A in funding my education

through financial aid and employment at *The Arkansas Traveler* newspaper and animal science lab under Dr. Charles Rosenkrans, faculty member in the Bumpers College.

While I may identify with participant's perceptions, I also differ from my subjects and have a unique relationship to the institution. I am not a graduate from the Bumpers College; however my father has been employed by the College for 24 years as a poultry breeding and genetics professor in the Department of Poultry Science. Growing up, my father educated me about agriculture through gardening, trips to the campus's farm, and discussions. Although agriculture has been ever-present in my life, it was not until I entered the Department of Agricultural, Education, Communications and Technology master's program in Agricultural and Extension Education that I began to actively study in the field.

As an undergraduate, I obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art Education, and continue to have a deep appreciation for print and electronic media. Graduating from the program, I gained skills in teaching, designing and coding websites, color theory, drawing, illustration, photography, layout design, typography, and bookmaking. I subscribe to a multichannel approach to not only gain information about an organization, but in my work as a visual communicator.

At the time of this study, I was employed by the Bumpers College as the Communications Graduate Assistant where I worked closely with the Dean's Office, specifically individuals responsible for the College's recruitment and development. Although I did have a hand in designing a few of the communication pieces assessed in this study including *The Graduate* magazine, *The Graduate* e-newsletter, and *AR Culture* magazine, I did not desire a specific outcome from the findings of this study. In addition, my job was not dependent on the findings of this study. Through this study, I sought to better understand Millennial

communication preferences, learn from this feedback, and offer recommendations for the Bumpers College to create and build relationships with Millennial alumni in the future. I hope that through this experience, I will gain marketable research skills that could later be applied to a profession in agricultural communications.

### ***Dependability and Confirmability***

Because interacting with individuals can influence the opinions of others (Krueger, 1988), it is important to improve dependability to ensure instrument reliability or the replicability of findings (Merriam, 2009). Researchers sought to increase dependability through a detailed audit trail covering the study's methods and decision points (Merriam, 2009). Unlike face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews must be kept short (Creswell, 1998). Print communications media to be evaluated were sent to participants seven to 15 days before scheduled interviews. Individual post dates were decided based on the distance of alumni residences. Digital communications media were sent to participants five to seven days before interviews to allow ample time for participants to review the content for this study but keep the email from being overlooked in participants' inbox. Each interview followed the same protocol, including timespan and questioning, to maintain consistency between interviews (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the evaluation of each communications medium, the interviewer verbally summarized participant responses to verify the validity of the data obtained with the respondent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Final transcripts were reviewed to make sure mistakes were not made during the transcription process (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). Following this review, codes were defined and compared with data (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). From these codes, themes were identified in transcripts and cross-checked with the research advisor to reach intercoder

agreement or triangulation (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007). An intercoder agreement of at least 80% was reached before proceeding (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Finally, the study's trustworthiness was reinforced through confirmability or objectivity of the qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). Methods such as member checking and an audit trail were used to provide the opportunity for an external auditor or peer review of the study. All print and electronic notes, interview recordings, and transcriptions were saved to add to the study's confirmability when reviewed.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Twenty telephone interviews were conducted by researchers to record consumer perceptions of print and digital communication efforts utilized by the Bumpers College in the last two years. Interviews were held throughout the months of March and April in the spring of 2014 and aimed to last between 30 to 45 minutes long. Participants scheduled their own interview based on a time and day that best suited their personal needs. Interviews were conducted in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology's conference room (when available) or the primary researcher's personal office during work hours and at her home office during evening hours. Speakerphone was implemented during each interview and was recorded using two varying audio recording devices (Olympus Digital Voice Recorder and Audio Memos iPad app). Handwritten notes of participant responses and interviewer impressions were recorded on printed versions of the interview protocol.

To begin each interview, the interviewer introduced herself and read through a prepared introduction from the interview script. The interviewer used a planned introduction and questioning route to ensure that each interview remained consistent with interview protocol (Creswell, 2009). Next, an ice-breaker question was asked to help build rapport and make

participants feel comfortable when speaking to the graduate student researcher (Creswell, 2009). Once the subject and researcher were acquainted, the interviewer introduced the creative piece. Four to five open-ended questions were asked to capture participant perceptions regarding a specific communications medium (Creswell, 2009). As the participant responded to each question, the interviewer took reflective notes which included researcher impressions and response summaries (Creswell, 2009). After the question route was completed for a single communications piece, the interviewer conducted member checking to make sure the recorded data agreed with the participant's intended perception (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process was repeated until each print and digital communications medium was reviewed. A brief survey was then administered as the last part of data collection for each interview to gain a deeper understanding of their past and present relationship with Bumpers College. Each participant interview was ended with a thank-you statement as a sign of gratitude for their time and help (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2007).

Following each interview session, audio recordings were uploaded to a computer and duplicated to an external hard-drive for backup. These audio recordings were assigned a name according to the order of interviews (ex: R1, R2, R3) and labeled with an A or I depending on their active or inactive alumni status. Active alumni were also denoted as  $n_1$  and inactive as  $n_2$  for further labeling. Audio recordings were then transcribed through abbreviated transcription into textual form and saved in a Microsoft Excel© and Word© 2010 file. The Excel© file included a column for each interview question and a row corresponding to the name of the audio file. Transcriptions were also recorded in Word© and organized according to question with each participant response listed. This format was included to improve the ease of analysis at a later date (Merriam, 2009). Because it typically takes a full day to transcribe a two hour interview

(Krueger, 1988), abbreviated transcription was used due to the graduate researcher's time constrictions. Only participant responses were noted for each question. All participant identifiers were removed to maintain confidentiality as promised during the initial contact and required by the IRB (Creswell, 2009). Notes from each interview were stored on the graduate researcher's office computer and external hard-drive. All data collection materials were kept on campus that was locked when the primary researcher was not present.

### ***Data Analysis Plans***

The analysis of qualitative data ...is conducted concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports (Creswell, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Researchers considered data analysis to be an ongoing process and took it into account for every stage of the study. For the purposes of this study, a basic qualitative analysis was used to identify themes following interrelated stages identified by Creswell (2009). Once all 20 interview sessions were completed, transcribed participant data was arranged according to their information source (Creswell, 2009) and interview question. The graduate researcher read through all of the data to gain a general sense of the information and reflect on its meaning (Creswell, 2009). Notes were taken throughout the transcription process to begin open coding. Notes were taken on general thoughts regarding the ideas and tone from participants (Creswell, 2009). Data was then coded and analyzed to identify emergent themes by categorizing sentences for each interview transcription (Creswell, 2009). Notes of possible themes were written in the margin and grouped according to similarity (Merriam, 2009). When a few were completed, open codes from each interview were clustered and consolidated to narrow in on key themes through axial coding (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). Themes were then alphabetized and used to guide analyses on the remaining interviews (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). Adjustments were made to themes if

new categories emerged in the remaining data (Creswell, 2009; Tesch, 1990). When coding, researchers sought the following codes as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992):

- Setting and context codes
- Perspectives held by subjects
- Subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects
- Process codes
- Activity codes
- Strategy codes
- Relationship and social structure codes
- Reassigned coding schemes (as cited by Creswell, 2009, p. 187)

Transcripts were hand coded using color schemes and key segments were cut and pasted under categorical themes (Creswell, 2009). Findings were represented through narratives supported by respondent quotations and organized according to themes. Themes were reported to add to branding and communication theories related to Millennial alumni from land-grant institutions. Each theme included a general summary written to capture lessons learned from the study (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Demographic data gathered through at the end of the interview and through the AAA database were also included in the findings to offer a second perspective.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### *Participants and Demographics*

Looking closely at the 20 participants, it is important to consider the demographics of each as they impact the way in which each respondent replied to interview questions.

Participants were 22 through 29 years of age with a range of 7 years. The age mean was 26.2 years, with a mode of 27 (five participants). For this study, there was no relationship between age and AAA status. Eight of the 10 active alumni were 25 years or older, and the same total was true for inactive alumni. The majority of interview participants ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ) had completed solely their bachelor's degree with seven participants working towards or having completed a master's degree. One active alumna was in the process of completing her doctoral degree and one inactive alumnus had completed his Ph.D.

As for AAA status, half of the 10 active alumni were considered a "Complimentary Individual," or were gifted a one-year subscription to the AAA following graduation (T. Holman, personal communication, April 30, 2014). The second most common classification for active participants was "Recent Grad Annual Individual." Three participants subscribed to this discounted membership option only available to alumni five years post-graduation at a rate of \$25 per year. Finally, one interviewed alumna was a Three-Year Joint member (\$135) and another alumnus was a Three-Year Individual member (\$120). When participants were asked if he or she had ever made a gift to the Bumpers College, six said they had regardless of their activity status.

In regard to location, there was no relationship between distance and their AAA status. Active and inactive participants were split evenly with two alumni residing out-of-state for each



category. Sixteen of the 20 participants ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ ) currently reside in Arkansas with 10 ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 4$ ) living an hour or less from the Bumpers College campus. The furthest participant was inactive and resided in Columbia, South Carolina ranging from 13 to 14 hours away by car.

Additional participant demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

*Millennial Alumni Participant Demographics (N = 20)*

Code	Status	AAA Subscription	Gender	Age	Current Location	Completed Edu.	Donor
R1	I		F	27	Springdale, AR	Master's	N
R2	I		M	26	Fayetteville, AR	Master's (current)	N
R3	I		F	24	Rogers, AR		N
R4	I		F	24	Maumelle, AR		N
R5	I		M	29	Fargo, ND	Doctoral	N
R6	I		F	29	Mountain Home, AR		N
R7	A	Three-Year Individual	M	26	Jonesboro, AR	Master's	Y
R8	A	Complimentary Individual	F	25	Little Rock, AR	Master's	N
R9	I		M	27	Hope, AR		Y
R10	A	Recent Grad Annual Individual	F	27	Shreveport, LA		Y
R11	I		F	27	Marion, AR		N
R12	A	Recent Grad Annual Individual	M	28	Fayetteville, AR		Y
R13	I		M	26	Lowell, AR		N

Table 1 (continued)

Code	Status	AAA Subscription	Gender	Age	Current Location	Completed Edu.	Donor
R14	A	Complimentary Individual	M	27	Fayetteville, AR	Master's	Y
R15	A	Complimentary Individual	M	23	Fayetteville, AR	Master's (current)	N
R16	I		F	28	Columbia, SC	Master's	N
R17	A	Three-Year Joint	F	29	Fayetteville, AR		Y
R18	A	Recent Grad Annual Individual	F	25	Lubbock, TX	Doctoral	N
R19	A	Complimentary Individual	F	22	Gravette, AR		N
R20	A	Complimentary Individual	F	25	Springdale, AR		N

*Note.* I = Inactive alumni, A = Active alumni

Researchers also sought to record and report each participant's academic relationship with the Bumpers College and University of Arkansas. Half of the interviewed alumni ( $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ) were first generation college graduates. Of those who were not first generation graduates, eight participants ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 3$ ) had a relative graduate from the University of Arkansas. Five of these participants were labeled as active alumni. Nineteen participants ( $n_1 = 9$ ,  $n_2 = 10$ ) reported receiving a scholarship or financial aid to complete their education at Bumpers College. The most common major for participants was agricultural business ( $n_1 = 3$ ,  $n_2 = 2$ ). Other represented majors included food science ( $n_1 = 2$ ,  $n_2 = 2$ ), animal science ( $n_1 = 2$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ), poultry science ( $n_1 = 2$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ) and foods, and human nutrition and hospitality ( $n_1 = 2$ ). Three participants ( $n_1 = 3$ ) had received a double major from the University of Arkansas. Nine participants ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 4$ ) had received a master's degree following their time at Bumpers

College with six ( $n_1 = 3$ ,  $n_2 = 3$ ) had returned to the College for graduate school. Two of these participants ( $n_1 = 1$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ) were currently enrolled as graduate students within the College at the time of their interview. A comprehensive breakdown of participant academic demographics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Millennial Alumni Participant Academic Demographics (N = 20)*

Code	Grad. Year	First Gen. College Grad.	Relative graduate from U of A	Received scholarship/ financial aid	Major	Graduate Education (M.S.)
IR1	'08	N	Y	Y	Agricultural & Extension Education	Bumpers College: Agriculture & Extension Education
IR2	'11	Y		Y	Crop Science	Bumpers College: Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences (Current)
IR3	'12	Y		Y	Agricultural Education, Communications & Technology	
IR4	'11	N	N	Y	Food Science	
IR5	'07	Y		Y	Environmental, Soil & Water Science	Bumpers College: Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences
IR6	'07	Y		Y	Animal Science	
AR7	'09	N	Y	Y	Agricultural Business, Finance	Sam M. Walton College of Business: —
AR8	'10	N	Y	Y	Apparel Studies	Bumpers College: Apparel Studies
IR9	'09	N	Y	Y	Agricultural Business	

Table 2 (continued)

Code	Grad. Year	First Gen. College Grad.	Relative graduate from U of A	Received scholarship/ financial aid	Major	Graduate Education (M.S.)
AR10	'09	N	N	Y	Foods, Human Nutrition & Hospitality	
IR11	'08	Y		Y	Poultry Science	
AR12	'07	Y		N	Agricultural Business	
IR13	'10	N	Y	Y	Agricultural Business	
AR14	'08	N	Y	Y	Agricultural Business	Bumpers College: Agricultural Economics
AR15	'13	Y		Y	Poultry Science, Food Science	Bumpers College: Poultry Science (Current)
IR16	'08	Y		Y	Food Science	College of Education and Health Profession: Health Science
AR17	'06	N	Y	Y	Food Science	
AR18	'10	N	Y	Y	Animal Science	–
AR19	'13	Y		Y	Foods, Human Nutrition & Hospitality	
AR20	'13	Y		Y	Poultry Science, Animal Science	

*Note.* A = Active alumni, I = Inactive alumni, – = Date Unavailable

### ***Medium/Engagement Preferences***

During each interview, an alumnus shared their communications engagement preferences. Millennial alumni ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 7$ ) preferred to receive their news or information digitally with email as the most popular form identified by participants ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 5$ ). In addition, four alumni ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 1$ ) preferred to receive a combination of print and electronic mail to stay informed. General magazines were most commonly read by participants ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 6$ ) in the print form, and three participants ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 2$ ) disclosed that they were unlikely to read publications received by the College because they do not read magazines. Four participants ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 1$ ) suggested finding a way to combine *The Graduate* and *AR Culture* publications by using the strengths of each including *AR Culture*'s student-written approach and brevity and structure of *The Graduate*.

Focusing on their digital communication preferences, most participants cited checking their email multiple times a day ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 9$ ). Alumni were typically prompted to check their email because they were expecting a message ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 3$ ) or it had become a habit ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 3$ ). Most alumni ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 5$ ) were more likely to open an email based on its sender rather than its subject line. It was through email that participants expected to typically receive emails about upcoming events ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 5$ ) or donation requests ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 2$ ). Participants also preferred to RSVP to Bumpers College events online because of convenience ( $n_1 = 10, n_2 = 7$ ).

Since graduating from the Bumpers College, five participants ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 1$ ) had returned to campus for an event. When asked what type of events they would return to campus for, most alumni ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 9$ ) cited a sporting or a football, tailgating event and preferred a casual atmosphere ( $n_1 = 9, n_2 = 7$ ). Alumni attended events in the hopes of reconnecting with professors and classmates ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 8$ ), networking, ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 6$ ), and helping students or

the Bumpers College in general ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 4$ ). Distance was mentioned as a barrier that prevented some Millennial alumni from attending most events throughout the year ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 4$ ). All but two participants ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 1$ ) voiced interest in learning more about the Bumpers College Alumni Society.

### ***Overview of Creative Pieces Assessed***

#### ***The Graduate Magazine***

Of the interviewed participants, most recognized *The Graduate* magazine and regularly receive it in the mail from the Bumpers College ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ ). For many ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 6$ ), *The Graduate* magazine was the only print communication participants received to assist them in remaining up-to-date with the College. Remaining participants either received additional publications, event postcards, or departmental newsletters ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 2$ ). Three participants could not recall anything in particular arriving in the mail from the College ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 2$ ). Only one participant thought he had received a magazine from Bumpers College under a different name than *The Graduate* ( $n_1 = 1$ ). Typically, participants noted that they initially scan or flip through the publication ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 6$ ) and only choose to invest time in reading particular articles because it related to them personally or they saw a familiar face ( $n = 11$ ) ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 5$ ).

When asked to share their perceptions on *The Graduate* magazine, there was a variety of positive, negative, and neutral perceptions. Participants valued the publication's professionalism ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 5$ ), in its appealing layout and photos and quality content and organization ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 5$ ). Alumni were typically drawn to photos and short features such as the "Bumpers College Family Album," "Class Notes," and "Meeting the Needs of the Poultry Industry: Bumpers College Filling Poultry Positions" that focused on specific individuals rather than general topics ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 7$ ). While alumni could identify with these sections, some urged for the inclusion of

more people-focused feature stories ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 5$ ) as seen in the *AR Culture* magazine. Article brevity ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 4$ ) and content variety ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 3$ ) were also perceived as a positive for the magazine as a little over half acknowledged that they flipped through the publication to find relatable articles. Despite these qualities, however its poultry, theme-based structure caught a few participants off-guard and overshadowed the positives for a few alumni. While poultry did appeal to most participants because of their background, two inactive alumni in particular felt alienated by the theme. Though not all participants were as offended by the theme, participants ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 5$ ) did express the need to appeal to the wider college by including a broad range of topics. Finally, two inactive alumni felt that the publication appealed to an older audience because of its design (IR5) and the lack of younger alumni featured in the “Class Notes” section of the publication (IR1). Table 3 illustrates key pros and cons identified by Millennial alumni supported by contextual quotes.

Table 3

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of The Graduate Magazine (N = 20)*

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Visually appealing</i> ( $n_1 = 8,$ $n_2 = 5$ )	“I like the layout. Everything is nice and neat and easy to follow. It’s very modern still. You can tell that they keep up with the times and the trends... Pictures are always high quality” (AR18).	<i>Theme-based structure (Poultry)</i> ( $n_1 = 2,$ $n_2 = 5$ )	“This whole edition for the most part was about poultry, and that's not my [level] of expertise, it's not necessarily something I'm interested in, I don't work in that field, I don't really relate to it... It wasn't a huge standout to me” (IR1).
<i>Personal features &amp; stories</i> ( $n_1 = 6,$ $n_2 = 7$ )	“My favorite part was when it was just the ‘Bumpers College Family Album.’ ... I really like things that are related to particular people instead of just Bumpers in general. It makes it more personal” (AR10).	<i>Impersonal features &amp; stories</i> ( $n_1 = 2,$ $n_2 = 5$ )	“I think Bumpers College overall is a people-focused college, and I think the magazine maybe should reflect that a little more” (IR4).

Table 3 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Professional quality</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“Overall, I’m pretty impressed. It’s very professional” AR14).	<i>For older audience</i> ( $n_2 = 2$ )	“I mean the class notes are interesting to kind of see except I noticed most of them are really older alumni. Most people my age have not sent in a lot of class notes...” (IR1).
<i>Recipes included</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“It’s just interesting to read, especially the recipes in the back. I like that” (IR16).		
<i>Variety in content</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 3$ )	“Going from giving a historical perspective of the poultry industry...but then it also jumps into chicken recipes, which is great! Having some diversity in it is really nice. If it was just homogenous from cover to cover, it’s a little daunting to go through it” (IR5).		
<i>Article brevity</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“I would say a good impression. I mean it’s a clean, full color, but it’s not overwhelming in length. That’s the thing I like about it is that it’s not too long. It’s in-depth but not cumbersome” (IR9).		

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### **AR Culture Magazine**

When reviewing the *AR Culture* magazine, few alumni ( $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ) were familiar with the publication prior to the study. Two of these participants (IR1 & AR18) had been involved in the production process of the first issue as students, and one alumna (AR8) had been interviewed and featured in the reviewed issue. The *AR Culture* publication was received differently in that a



few alumni who stated preference for electronic publications (IR1, IR5, AR8) expressed interest in a print version of *AR Culture* for showcasing at their home or office. Of those who were unfamiliar with *AR Culture* ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 8$ ), all but two active and two inactive alumni showed interest in receiving the publication in the future. Barriers preventing these alumni from receiving the publication included too much content (AR10), not enough time read (IR13), not feeling like the target audience (AR14, IR7), underdeveloped articles (AR14), and a preference for *The Graduate's* structure (IR7).

In expressing their perceptions of the publication, most alumni noticed the publication was student-produced ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 8$ ), and saw this quality as an incentive to engage in the publication ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 5$ ). Alumni also valued the people-focused structure of the publication's feature stories ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 7$ ) as it not only linked them to their alma mater, but helped them recognize the impact its current students have within the local and global community. Although feature stories were noted as diverse ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 3$ ) and in-depth ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 4$ ), the technical quality and length of the publication prevented a few alumni from engaging in the publication. A detailed list of the pros and cons related to the *AR Culture* publication can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of AR Culture Magazine (N = 20)*

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>About people</i> ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 7$ )	"I like that it just highlights different things that the students are doing around the world... That's just interesting to know students from my alma mater are able to have that sort of hand in something that big. You know, the ones that have gone to Africa and really made a difference" (IR6).	<i>Length</i> ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 2$ )	"I [found] some of the articles to be kind of wordy, and some of the titles are kind of short and don't really give you much about what the article's going to be about" (AR15).

Table 4 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>High quality</i> ( $n_1 = 4$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“I think it’s very professional... [T]his might sound crazy but it’s like a true magazine. It’s on nice paper, the layout’s great, photos are incredible quality, and... it’s very diverse” (AR8).	<i>Limited circulation</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“Maybe more easily accessible or get to where more people know about it because I didn’t even know about this magazine” (IR3).
<i>Student-produced</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“I really liked seeing what students wrote. Having a picture with a name makes me still feel connected to the U of A. Just being able to kind of see who it is and maybe what career path or major they’re going with” (IR9).	<i>Unengaging</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“It’s kind of like the other side of the argument where like <i>The Graduate</i> is like super business, professional kind of feeling, and the <i>AR Culture</i> is kind of on the other end of that where it kind of feels more school newspaperery... I guess I feel like I’m not necessarily the target audience for this one” (AR14).
<i>Diverse</i> ( $n_1 = 4$ , $n_2 = 3$ )	“I like the fact that it does give diversity. It covers every single, for the most part, area in the Bumpers College... I mean it really does embody the entire Bumpers College” (IR1).	<i>Text too small</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“...[E]ven I noticed, and I’m not an old guy by any means, but a lot of the text is very small” (IR5).
<i>In-depth</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“...[T]here’s a number of stories in here, I mean there’s got to be getting close to two dozen short stories in here. This is something that I could throw on the coffee counter and when I get home in the evening over the next month, I can casually read through it...” (IR5).	<i>Poor photo quality</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ )	There are some photos that you can tell maybe aren’t high resolution or they were blurry. I think photo quality needs to be increased as well as consistency on the signature blocks” (AR18).

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### ***The Graduate E-Newsletter***

While this email was sent to all alumni with a valid email address in the AAA database, only six alumni recognized the subject line or *The Graduate* e-newsletter email ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 4$ ). When asked their likelihood of opening the email based on its subject line, 12 alumni ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 7$ ) said they were likely or would open it. Most ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 7$ ) expressed interest in the email because it mentioned Bumpers College in the subject line with three alumni (AR8, IR9) stating they were more likely to open the email because it did not come from the general U of A. Further, six alumni ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 4$ ) felt that the subject line was unclear about what the email would contain. Finally, three alumni ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 1$ ) expressed disinterest in receiving the same content twice or having the ability to opt for either the print or electronic channel.

After viewing the e-newsletter, only five alumni ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 4$ ) said that they were more likely to read the digital version of *The Graduate* than the printed edition. One alumna (AR8) changed her preference from digital to print, and two alumni ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 1$ ) who preferred to read magazines in print stated that they were more likely to read the digital version. Four alumni ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 1$ ) added that the e-newsletter was not compatible or was visually skewed by their personal viewing experience. Other barriers for engagement included unengaging visuals ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 2$ ) and content ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 2$ ), which left alumni feeling uncompelled to read articles. While the e-newsletter was not very appealing, alumni did find it easy to navigate ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 3$ ) and convenient to access in its digital form ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 6$ ). Unlike the print, this piece was perceived as cheaper to produce ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 4$ ), better for the environment ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 5$ ), and could more easily link them to social media or webpages to prompt further connectivity ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 1$ ). Finally, alumni could quickly scan content ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 6$ ) and more easily work it into

their daily routine. Table 5 contains a detailed breakdown of the pros and cons associated with the electronic version of *The Graduate* magazine based on Millennial alumni perceptions.

Table 5

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of The Graduate E-Newsletter (N = 20)*

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>College-specific subject line</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 7$ )	“I’d probably take a look at it just because if it came from Bumpers College, they have my information, it’s unlikely to be spam” (IR13).	<i>Unclear subject line</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“Honestly, I probably wouldn’t know—I would just think that it was maybe a newsletter but I wouldn’t make the same connection to the print” (AR19).
<i>Convenient / Instant</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 6$ )	“It’s great because you can access it anywhere at any time. You know if you got a smart phone or on a computer, you got some extra time, that kind of thing” (AR12).	<i>Visually unengaging</i> ( $n_1 = 4$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“It just doesn’t catch my attention as much as the print does. Maybe it’s the images, the pictures that are lacking that <i>The Graduate</i> has and this doesn’t. But it just doesn’t seem to make me want to open anything” (AR17).
<i>Quick to scan</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 6$ )	“I guess one benefit would be since it kind of has a short, little tidbit about each article, you could see if it’d be something that’d be interesting to you and click on the ‘Read More’ to take you to that” (AR15).	<i>Tech errors</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“...[I] t’s hard to open when there’s that many pictures on your phone. I mean even if I tried to open it, it’s not going to look right on my phone, so then I have to wait until I have a computer to open it. It’s not a phone-friendly email. Everyone checks their email on their phone” (IR4).
<i>Easy to navigate</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 3$ )	“I really liked it a lot. I thought it was really easy to navigate and user-friendly. It was nice. I liked it” (IR11).	<i>Unengaging content</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“Things like this to me become more of a hassle... because I can’t see if I would want to read any of these articles. It’s got three sentences and then a read more button—that’s not enticing enough for me to click ‘Read More’ (IR13).

Table 5 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Green / No bulk</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“Well I’m definitely, you know, save the trees and don’t be wasteful. Like I said, so many people I’m sure just throw it right in the trash and not think anything else about it” (AR10).	<i>Duplicated content</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“Well if you’re going to send it to me in the mail and in my inbox, I don’t see much benefit in it. Like I read this <i>Graduate</i> magazine, and then I opened this email and looked at it and said, ‘Well I’ve already read all that, I read it in the magazine’ (AR7).
<i>Saves money</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“Well I think [with] electronic form it could probably be published more than twice a year as in it could possibly be a cheaper way to get higher volume out” (AR14).		
<i>Prompts connectivity</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“...[Y]ou have the links right there. So for example, if I didn’t know they had Pinterest, I could click on the Pinterest icon and then go follow them. Where I can’t to do in the magazine” (AR18).		

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### ***Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate Invitation***

This email was sent to all active and inactive Bumpers College alumni with a valid email address and was recognized by 12 alumni ( $n_1 = 6$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ). Although it was widely recognized, only three active alumni had attended the event since graduating. Looking at the subject line in particular, 12 alumni ( $n_1 = 6$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ) said they had opened or were likely to open the email to look at the digital invitation. While having ‘tailgate’ in the subject line attracted some alumni ( $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ), others were less likely to open the email because of its long and detailed subject

line. Because it included so much information, alumni ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 4$ ) could determine whether or not they could attend and thus had no need to open the email. Another disadvantage to the long subject line was that it was either cropped by an email provider (AR17) or was overlooked with keywords buried amongst text (IR5). Finally, two active alumni were uninterested in a tailgate event.

When discussing the invitation itself, alumni were able to see the personal benefits of attending the event such as catching up with friends and professors ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ ) and networking ( $n_1 = 7, n_2 = 7$ ). They perceived it as a casual, fun ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 5$ ), and family-friendly event ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 1$ ) based on the event details presented in the text. Some Millennial alumni ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 3$ ) felt the invitation provided too much content and noted a better job should have been done with condensing it to just the important information and including a link to the Bumpers College website for more information (IR1, IR4, & IR5). Participants IR1, AR7, and IR4 felt that the invitation looked boring and could have used more graphics to visually promote the event. Table 6 illustrates invitation’s key pros and cons.

Table 6

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate Invitation*  
(N = 20)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Catching up with friends and professors</i> ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ )	“It’s just a good time to talk to people face-to-face rather than—like I talk to H. L. Goodwin every once in a while on LinkedIn and email about different things, but one email every other month isn’t the same as sitting down and having a 20 minute conversation about stuff. Face-to-face interaction is definitely good” (IR13).	<i>Too much content in invitation</i> ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 3$ )	“It’s a little wordy. It’s got too much text on there. When you get down towards the bottom—well pretty much throughout the whole email—every other line is bolded and italics and underlined... I think you could simplify it a little bit more. I do get the point of it, but I think they were trying a little hard with all of the colors, and bold, and underlines” (AR7).

Table 6 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Networking opportunity</i> ( $n_1 = 7$ , $n_2 = 7$ )	“You don’t need to have to know somebody or a great friend for several years to go to a tailgate, and just be like, ‘Yeah! Go hogs!’ You can have a good time with complete strangers. But the best thing about these is that it has the university, and it serves as a point to bring everybody together regardless of your past with that specific person” (IR5).	<i>Subject line too detailed</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“If I knew I was going to the game that weekend, probably a real good likelihood I would open... If I knew that I had something else going on, then there’s a zero chance I would look at it probably” (IR9).
<i>Tailgate mentioned in subject line</i> ( $n_1 = 4$ , $n_2 = 6$ )	“The tailgate in and of itself is something I’m interested in attending, and so just by having it as the subject line would make me want to open the email” (IR1).	<i>Subject line too long</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“My inbox doesn’t actually show a whole subject line. It’ll show ‘really long subject line.’ It’ll possibly show the first few words of it and then kind of cut off depending on how long it is” (AR17).
<i>Looks fun &amp; casual</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	It’s just going to be a fun, casual, and relaxed tailgate for you and whoever you want to bring before the football game” (AR8).	<i>No interest in tailgates</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ )	“Whenever I think tailgate, I’m thinking football. If that pops up, usually I’m never interested in it. It’s one of those things that I just kind of think football and that just goes into the trash” (AR20).
<i>Family-friendly</i> ( $n_1 = 4$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“It seemed like it was going to be family-friendly and that it was going to be just laidback and kind of ‘come and hang out.’ It’s not like you have to be here at a certain time—just kind of an open invitation” (AR19).	<i>Invitation looks boring</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ )	“I might throw a picture of a Razorback, or a football field, or something like that on the tailgate invitation to make it a little bit more interesting. It’s just a bunch of words and text right now” (AR7).
<i>Donate to scholarship fund</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 2$ )	“...[F]or the silent auction, benefits go to a scholarship fund, so you’d be helping somebody out with a scholarship fund” (IR3).		

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### ***Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party Invitation***

Most Millennial alumni ( $n_1 = 9, n_2 = 8$ ) were unfamiliar with this invitation as it is specifically target toward alumni who reside in the Benton and Washington Counties of Arkansas. Only one alumna had attended this event in the past since graduating from the Bumpers College and happens to serve on the Bumpers College Alumni Society Board. Looking at the subject line, less participants ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 5$ ) said they were likely to open the email than with the previous tailgate invitation. There was more confusion with this subject line because participants had never heard of a mocktail party ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 5$ ), were unsure of which alumni were invited ( $n_2 = 2$ ), or were unsure of what ‘alumni-student’ meant ( $n_1 = 1$ ). Despite the lack of clarity in the subject line, four participants said they would open the email because it deals with the U of A or Bumpers College ( $n_1 = 3, n_2 = 1$ ).

When reviewing the invitation, participants remained confused about the purpose of the event and its details. Five participants ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 3$ ) felt that the event description was vague and struggled to see the point in attending the event. When asked about the event’s details, message, and benefits based its invitation, eight alumni ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 4$ ) seemed to overlook the event’s primary focus to serve as a mentoring opportunity. While certain aspects of the event were not well communicated, Millennial alumni ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 7$ ) were able to pick up on the formality of the event based on the invitation’s design. Participants ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ ) also noted helping or providing feedback to current students as one of the benefits to attending the event as well as networking ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 5$ ). Looking at the invitation, seven participants ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 6$ ) said they would be uninterested in attending the event, and two alumnae felt that its design did not reflect Bumpers College’s branding ( $n_2 = 2$ ). Two alumni ( $n_2 = 2$ ) believed the invitation provided enough information to alumni regarding event details, while others ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 1$ )



wished that the sender had taken the time to create active RSVP links for the invitation. Support for each of the mentioned pros and cons can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party Invitation*  
(N = 20)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Helping students</i> ( $n_1 = 8$ , $n_2 = 8$ )	“There are alumni to help them get through. That’s what I appreciated so much from when I was in school. I’m giving [time] to return that and hoping that some of those students have the same experience that I did, and when they graduate [they will in] turn try to help the next class. (AR17).	<i>No interest in event</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 6$ )	“This feels kind of like very just classically business professional, hob knobby, networky stuff. I’ve never been a big fan of it, but it’s still nice to do it” (AR14).
<i>Networking opportunity</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“The networking would kind of draw me to think that I would want to attend this event. Just to hear what line of work other people are in and potentially just make those connections” (AR19).	<i>Unsure of what a mocktail party was</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 5$ )	“...I’m wanting to know what a mocktail party is—I don’t really understand that... Is it like a pretend cocktail party? That’s kind of what I’m getting” (IR3).
<i>Formality of event clear</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 7$ )	“I automatically get the message that I would need to dress up for this and that it looks like it would be connecting the current students with alumni who have already graduated” (AR10).	<i>Unclear subject line / Confusion</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“It looks like it’s going to be a more formal event from looking at the invitation but overall I don’t know that it’s something I would go to from looking at it... I don’t think it’s exactly clear to me what it is, a professional mocktail party” (IR11).
<i>Subject line mentions U of A or Bumpers College</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“Anything that has kind of the U of A stamp or Bumpers College on it, I try to take a look at” (AR10).	<i>Vague event description</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 4$ )	“It’s got ‘An Evening of Engagement and Networking’ but it doesn’t say what activities are going to happen. Are there going to be panel discussions? Are there going to be different games played with this and

Table 7 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Subject line mentions U of A or Bumpers College</i> ( $n_1 = 3$ , $n_2 = 1$ )			that? It could probably use a little more description on what you're getting into" (IR13).
<i>Had all information needed in invitation</i> ( $n_2 = 2$ )	"It kind of makes me think business ties type of event, but then it gets right to the point in saying 'An evening of engagement with networking among alumni and current students' and then just gives the pertinence of it really short and sweet. It's nice and simple and it appears formal" (IR5).	<i>Uninviting visuals</i> ( $n_2 = 2$ )	"They were trying to fake being fancy. We use fancy-looking letters for 'Connecting Bumpers.' I don't think of Bumpers College being a fancy college. I mean everybody's wondering around in cowboy boots on a <i>farm</i> . So 'Connecting Bumpers,' it looks very uppity... Yeah like it doesn't match the image. That's not the Bumpers College" (IR4).
		<i>No active link to RSVP</i> ( $n_1 = 1$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	"Anything—especially electronically, if it can be <i>linked</i> , I'd prefer it to be linked. That way I can just click on it and go. Because it says RSVP to, and there's an email address. I would want to just be able to click on that email address and not have to type it in myself" (AR18).

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### Bumpers College Website and Alumni Homepage

Most Millennial alumni participants ( $n_1 = 9$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ) said they had visited their alma mater's website since graduating from the Bumpers College. Participants ( $n_1 = 6$ ,  $n_2 = 3$ ) were typically drawn to the site for directory information to contact previous faculty and staff they

worked with as students. Overall, participants ( $n_1 = 9, n_2 = 7$ ) were very pleased with the website and found it to be user-friendly and easy to navigate and noted ease in finding information. A few specifically expressed liking for the visuals ( $n_1 = 5$ ) and interactive news slideshow ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 1$ ). Some of the cons associated with the website included dated or unappealing graphics ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 3$ ), and most importantly a lack of content to keep alumni connected and involved with their alma mater. Alumni not only suggested adding a calendar of events to the alumni homepage ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 5$ ), but updating and adding resources about the Bumpers College Alumni Society, satellite locations, and giving to the institution ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 5$ ) to motivate alumni activity. Table 8 illustrates key pros and cons identified by Millennial alumni supported by contextual quotes.

Table 8

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Bumpers College Website & Alumni Homepage (N = 20)*

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>User-friendly / Easy to navigate</i> ( $n_1 = 9, n_2 = 7$ )	“I feel like it’s better put together now than it was in the past. It’s less spread out, less random. I know what’s going to be a dropdown, what’s not going to be a dropdown, that kind of stuff” (AR14).	<i>No upcoming alumni events posted</i> ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 5$ )	“I think I’d also like to be able to see a calendar of events that way I could mark my calendar or know when things are coming, if there’s any upcoming things” (AR18).
<i>Faculty &amp; staff directory information</i> ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 3$ )	“If I need to call somebody from food science on a professional question about a product that I’m working on or something, I’ll go to the website and look under the food science department under the staff, faculty [tab] to find their contact information. But that’s pretty much the only reason I go to the website” (AR17).	<i>Alumni content minimal / Limited info on how to get more involved</i> ( $n_1 = 4, n_2 = 5$ )	“I thought it was really neat how it had the alumni and friends blog, but when you go to it the last update was in 2011. So maybe if that were updated more frequently. Or if it wasn’t going to be utilized, possibly taken down from the website just so that it doesn’t look like something that’s just being neglected” (AR8).

Table 8 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Visually pleasing</i> ( $n_1 = 5$ )	“I love the redesign. It’s much more appealing and user-friendly” (AR18).	<i>Visually outdated / Could be more appealing</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 3$ )	“Just make it more appealing. Visually... It just doesn’t catch my eye. I mean it looks like your basic website that just has a scrolling slideshow of photos, I mean the content doesn’t even change beside it” (IR1).
<i>Slideshow with news</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	“I do like the slideshow... [I]t’s going through different stories. I like the features this way (IR13).	<i>Difficult to navigate</i> ( $n_1 = 2$ , $n_2 = 1$ )	It takes a little bit of getting used to and figuring out where all you need to go... If I have time, I can look for it, and I find different things that I’d looked for in the past. But sometimes whenever I just need information right then, it seems really hard to find the information I’m looking for” (AR20).

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

### Bumpers College Social Media Presences

All interviewed Millennial alumni possessed a social media presence. Most participants ( $n_1 = 10$ ,  $n_2 = 9$ ) said they had a Facebook profile. One alumnus stated he deleted his Facebook profile about a year ago. LinkedIn was the second most popular social media presence ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ), however is not checked as frequently for updates. A few alumni ( $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 3$ ) also had a Twitter account but rarely interacted with the site. Over half of participants ( $n_1 = 8$ ,  $n_2 = 7$ ) said they were connected to at least two forms of social media. Six participants ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ) were currently connected to Bumpers College through social media with Facebook being the most popular. The most frequent reason ( $n_1 = 6$ ,  $n_2 = 5$ ) alumni were not connected was because it needed to be either advertised more or the Bumpers College needed to send invites through the

each social media platform. Even with an increase in advertising these presences, a few alumni were unhappy with the lack of two-way communication or activity on both Facebook and LinkedIn presences. The College’s Facebook profile photo was also perceived as negative as it either displayed an overly-cropped version of the College’s logo or didn’t display the logo at all. Two alumni mentioned that they were pleased with the amount of content posted to the Bumpers College Facebook page, and one alumna was aware of a second Bumpers College Facebook page specifically designed for alumni which was often confused or overlooked for the student page. See Table 9 for additional information.

Table 9

*Millennial Alumni Perceptions of Bumpers College Social Media Presences (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) (N = 20)*

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
<i>Good amount of content (Facebook) (n<sub>1</sub> = 2)</i>	“For me, it was just awareness. I never thought to look it up and so I never did. And now that I see it, it actually looks like a super active page with a lot of updates and information and I appreciate that so I’m going to definitely sign up” (AR14).	<i>Not advertised / Need to increase awareness (n<sub>1</sub> = 6, n<sub>2</sub> = 5)</i>	“I think just making us more aware of it because again I had no idea that they even had a Facebook page, so—And I’m sure when it sends out the digital things, it says there’s a Facebook and Twitter thing right on there. But maybe just bring more attention to that” (AR10).

		<i>Confusing profile picture (Facebook) (n<sub>1</sub> = 2, n<sub>2</sub> = 1)</i>	“I like the one that they have with their cover photo, just a bunch of students, probably the ambassadors and that’s fine. But then the actual [profile] picture is just this blurry, pixelated picture that you can’t even see all of the words in because they didn’t shrink it down correctly. It once again
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Table 9 (continued)

Pros	Support	Cons	Support
		<p><i>Confusing profile picture (Facebook)</i> (<math>n_1 = 2</math>, <math>n_2 = 1</math>)</p>	<p>looks like somebody who's too old to use Facebook has made this front page" (IR4).</p>
		<p><i>No two-way communication / Inactive</i> (<math>n_1 = 1</math>, <math>n_2 = 1</math>)</p>	<p>"Well I'm connected, so they did something right. Though a lot of times, it's not necessarily a two-way communication in as much as I would prefer it to be. Like most of the time it's just, 'Okay, I'm going to go post something so it looks like we're doing something,' which is great. But if you go through, there's hardly any likes, any comments, any shares, so I think there needs to be more interaction somehow" (AR18).</p>
		<p><i>Confusion between two Bumpers College Facebook presences</i> (<math>n_1 = 1</math>)</p>	<p>"Even looking at the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences one, I don't know if this one is the student page or if it's an alumni page or if there's only one page for both... [B]ut if the alumni didn't know that there were two, they may sign up for this one not knowing that there's one just for alumni. And then they're not going to be getting the right information" (AR17).</p>

Note. AR /  $n_1$  = Active alumni, IR /  $n_2$  = Inactive alumni

## ***Emergent Themes***

From the questions outlined in the interview protocol, emergent themes were identified based on the stated perceptions, keywords, and dictation provided by participants throughout their individual interviews. Two overall themes emerged related to Bumpers College Millennial alumni's connection to the College and included: A) *Building the Professional* and B) *Interest in Giving Back*. As participants reviewed and discussed each of the eight communications media, the following themes emerged related to Bumpers College Millennial alumni's connection to the media: A) *Message Relationship/Consumption*; B) *Specialized Content*; C) *Communications Medium/Channel*; D) *Message Barriers*; and E) *Need for Branding/Promotion*.

### ***Alumni Connection to College***

#### **A. Building the Professional**

- a. Established crucial career connections as Bumpers College student (10 respondents)  
IR1, IR2, IR5, AR7, AR8, IR11, IR13, IR16, AR17, AR18
- b. Applying skills gained as a student in workplace (15 respondents)  
IR3, IR4, IR6, AR7, IR9, AR10, AR12, IR13, AR14, AR15, IR16, AR17, AR18,  
AR19, AR20
- c. Networking (16 respondents)  
IR1, IR2, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, AR8, AR12, IR13, AR14, AR15, AR16, AR17, AR18,  
AR19, AR20

This emergent theme was supported by the following key words: foundation, tools, encouraged, leadership, leg-up, hands-on, skillsets, relationship, jump-started, foot-in-the-door, shadow, internship, connections, networking, and shadow.

When asked to discuss how their education from Bumpers College had impacted their career, most participants spoke in length and detail about the variety of ways in which their connections and education uniquely prepared them for the job market. For half of the respondents ( $n_1 = 4$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ), connections made during their time at Bumpers College either steered them towards an occupation or literally landed them a job.

What I think's different about Bumpers College is they really do a great job at providing networking tools, opportunities for you to get involved in different clubs, and really involved in the department as a whole. And internships are a huge thing... I'm actually I'm still working for the company today that I interned with while I was at the University of Arkansas. So I think Bumpers College does an excellent job at that. The education is great too, but I'm not really sure *that's* what sets it apart from anybody else. (AR17)

Others in this group credited particular faculty and staff that opened new doors for them by helping them match their interests with a career field. One alumna who is currently finishing a doctoral degree reflected,

[I] did my master's in ag leadership. The reason I decided to do that was because I had approached Casandra Cox with a research idea, and I had taken some of her leadership courses and really loved it. I had no idea that you could even pursue a degree in [agricultural] leadership. You couldn't at Arkansas, but you can at other institutions. And so that really sparked my interest... (AR18)

Another alumna commented,

The professor that I worked under and then all of my advisors, they really kind of jumpstarted and encouraged me into the position that I'm currently in and that's a designer for Dillard's department stores in Little Rock. So it was really just a great experience, there's really nothing bad I can say about it. I mean I truly feel that's what got me to where I am. (AR8)

Through invaluable relationships made between the industry and educators, students were able to transition into careers or further their education in their field of study.

For most respondents, however, it was skills acquired through coursework and enhanced, hands-on experiences that made the biggest impact on their careers. In describing how his skills were used, one participant explained, "I wanted to learn more of the business side, and I deal



with that literally on a day-to-day basis. Bumpers College has a well-rounded [program], from law to economics... that we use every day, so that's definitely benefited me" (IR9). Although not all participants have been able to work in the field they studied, alumni are still finding ways to apply the practical skills gained as a student.

Even though I'm not using [my degree] necessarily in a traditional sense, I still find myself using the influence that my education had on me in everyday life... I'm currently working with a missions organization that is working to do nutritional education programs in other countries, so even though my job that pays me isn't using my education I have other things that I'm kind of using it towards. (AR19)

Regardless of whether respondents were directly using their degree in their occupation or not, no alumni said they were professionally unprepared or upset with their collegiate experience. Four participants (IR3, AR12, IR16, AR20) did note they were currently seeking new employment opportunities. Two other alumni respondents (IR2, AR15) commented that their time with the College presented additional professional development opportunities within the University system. "It has set me up for graduate school by setting a solid foundation, in classwork, and as far as some hands-on experience to identify problems that could be solved by doing a master's thesis" (AR15). In addition, four participants (IR3, AR15, IR16, AR19) made it known later in the interview that they have considered returning to Bumpers College to pursue a master's degree in the future. Only one alumna seemed to have a detached perspective of her relationship with the College. "When I was in school, I was more involved with my sorority and that kind of thing. Yeah, sorry I'm not really helpful on that one. My major helped me get a job" (AR10).

When the discussing benefits of continuing their relationship with the College by attending alumni events, all active alumni and most inactive alumni ( $n_1 = 10$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ) viewed it as

a networking opportunity to meet a diverse group of people who share a passion for agriculture, food, and life sciences and tie to the Bumpers College.

I always thought one of the great opportunities of college in general is the ability to meet all sorts of people, from all over the world, different cultures, even within your state... Being at those events, it's nice when you get a good representative of what you felt during undergraduate years with being exposed to all sorts of people. (IR5)

Maintaining a connection with the College by attending events was also perceived as a way to create new business connections. An alumna explained her perspective saying,

I think it's an opportunity to catch up with old friends, and then there are a lot of alumni doing a lot of great things out there and it never hurts to network. You may not necessarily be looking for a job now but it doesn't mean that you won't be in the future. [Plus], there isn't an alumnus out there that couldn't be a potential client. The networking opportunity is invaluable. (IR1)

While these events do allow alumni to meet and make potential career connections, that should not be the sole reason for visiting campus. One alumnus reflected,

[Sometimes] you've got people obviously going around, just trying to network with everybody they can so they'll hire them. And that gets kind of annoying. That's not really what I would view these events for. I think it should be a lot more leisure and social and not any kind of a pressure situation. (IR13)

By attending events and keeping a relationship with the Bumpers College, alumni hoped to create and maintain meaningful connections with other alumni, professors, and staff, and not to just help their personal career.

## **B. Interest in Giving Back**

### **a. Donation/Scholarship (15 respondents)**

IR1, IR2, IR3, IR5, AR7, AR8, IR9, AR10, IR11, AR12, IR13, AR15, AR17, AR18,  
AR20

b. Mentoring students/Services (16 respondents)

IR1, IR2, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, AR8, AR10, AR12, IR13, AR15, IR16, AR17, AR18,  
AR19, AR20

c. Volunteer/Donating time (9 respondents)

IR1, IR2, IR5, IR6, IR4, IR11, AR14, AR17, AR18

The second overall emergent theme of Interest in Giving Back was supported by the following key words: scholarship, help, fund, mentor, internship, directly, benefit, time, give, service, contribute, volunteering, financially, money, and advice.

While money was perceived as a barrier to the alumni-college relationship by participants ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 2$ ), most participants responded positively toward the idea of giving back financially, but most noted it would be in the future. When asked if they would rather donate funds, time, or services, nine alumni ( $n_1 = 5, n_2 = 4$ ) said they would primarily prefer to give back financially. Three alumni ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 2$ ) also expressed interest in contributing financially in addition to either their time and/or services. One alumnus cited donating funds as a convenience because he just began his career.

Just being a recent graduate new in the work world, there's not a lot of time to donate, but definitely in the future as I get more involved and more comfortable in my job, I might [have things] that I could contribute and advice I could give. (AR8)

Making a financial gift was also viewed as the most convenient option for respondents who lived far from the College campus. "If I was able, [I would give] services and then time. But given how I don't live near the College, then funds when feasible for me and my family would probably be the way that would work" (IR6). When respondents discussed giving, some were more interested in providing directly to current students rather than the College as a whole "...[I]f I ever came to the point where I had a considerable amount of money to give the

program, it'd likely go into some form of scholarship... Funding *that* could help some of the other current students out" (IR5). Although many showed interest in giving back financially, participants noted needing more time to accumulate money to give.

Contributing to the College through mentoring and service opportunities was also appealing to alumni. This was a way alumni could easily give back not only directly to the students but were in the capacity to do so presently. A few respondents ( $n_2 = 3$ ) mentioned during their interview that they had or are currently collaborating with past professors to help mentor or offer services for students. Not only did they feel good about giving back to their alma mater, but they were glad to be providing a meaningful opportunity to current students.

...[F]or the other events a lot of them are student related like the mocktail. Those are not for me as much as I want to offer those students what I had as a student and those opportunities to network and meet with professionals and learn. So I'm kind of returning the favor I guess. College was so great and I think helpful to me in that aspect that I feel like I owe them in returning that for future students. (AR17)

Finally, alumni were least likely to donate their time for general volunteer opportunities. As with monetary donations, alumni cited being too fresh in their careers to have the ability to donate.

### ***Alumni Connection to Media***

#### **A. Message Relationship/Consumption**

- a. Focusing content on individual people (17 respondents)

IR1, IR2, IR3, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, AR8, IR9, AR10, AR12, IR13, AR15, IR16,  
AR18, AR19, AR20

- b. Familiarity/Seeing familiar faces or programs (12 respondents)

IR1, IR3, IR4, IR5, AR8, IR9, AR10, IR13, IR15, AR17, AR19, AR20

c. Scanning media for relatable content (10 respondents)

IR1, IR3, IR5, AR7, IR9, IR11, AR12, AR15, AR17, IR19

d. Specialized invitations to events (5 respondents)

IR1, IR2, AR8, IR13, AR17

The ‘Message Relationship/Consumption’ theme was supported by the following key words: handwritten, students, professors, people, programs, department, face, profile(s), scan familiarity, and recognize.

Throughout the review of each medium, respondents wanted to feel like Bumpers College was connecting with them on a personal level. When asked about what they wanted to receive from their alma mater, all participants referenced desiring updates on specific people in the College such as the students and professors. Whether through the visual and textual content, special events, or event invitations, alumni wanted to feel they have made a connection with someone.

My favorite part was when it was just the ‘Bumpers College Family Album.’ It was what alumni have been doing and pictures of like the girl meeting Clinton, and the old homecoming queen. I really like things that are related to particular people instead of just Bumpers in general. It makes it more personal. (AR10)

Sections such as the “Bumpers College Family Album,” “Class Notes,” and the writing angle of *AR Culture* feature articles were standout moments to alumni who encouraged the College to add more people-focused content. Respondents noted that they typically did not read everything featured in a communications medium distributed by the College, but scanned both print and digital content for key words, images, and content related specifically to their interests and connections. Only when they found a personal connection to the content did they read the whole article. One participant explained,

I would say that I at least flip through every single one of them, and if I see something that kind of catches my eye then I will sure enough sit down and read it. I wouldn't say that I read every one of them, but I see every one of them and I've flipped through every one that comes. (IR9)

While respondents did enjoy staying up-to-date on what's going on in the College through its students and professors, instances of seeing familiar faces and programs were not only what they remembered most, but noted as a point of entry to engage in the media. One respondent who typically leaves their copy of *The Graduate* magazine unread reflected,

I think I sat down and read one article in this one (Winter 2014), and the *only* reason was because when I opened that very first page, one of the photos was a friend of mine and there was a story about him and his career... (IR1)

Anticipating familiar faces and having an opportunity to reconnect with past instructors and classmates was also a reason most alumni ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 9$ ) would consider attending a Bumpers College event. Most respondents ( $n_1 = 8, n_2 = 8$ ) were drawn to the idea of the alumni and friends tailgate event as it would attract the attention of many former students and professors. On the other hand, while many connected the event with seeing familiar faces, others said they would be more swayed to attend more specialized, departmental events.

Just a random invitation like this to me wouldn't really entice me to come because I feel like it'd probably be my wife would show up and not know anybody there... It would probably be just a room full of people I've never seen before eating a buffet. (IR13)

Along with this intimate approach to alumni events, a few respondents ( $n_1 = 2, n_2 = 3$ ) noted that they valued personalized invitations or being approached by an individual professor or student to attend a Bumpers College events.

I don't know if it's because I'm on the board that I got so many invitations and the handwritten invitation from the ambassadors... I'm not sure what their motive was, but it worked. It was nice. It's nice to get the handwritten note. (AR17)

A second respondent commented,

[I prefer to receive invitations] through the mail. If it's an actual event that's not complete mass produced, it actually shows that somebody took the time to send it to me rather than blast it to a group because then it goes to thousands of people. And it's less likely to be overlooked by me. (IR13, 2014)

Alumni are more willing to give Bumpers College their time when it looks like a message has been specially crafted for a few select individuals rather than forward to the masses.

## **B. Specialized Content**

### a. Research (8 respondents)

IR3, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, IR9, AR14, AR15

### b. Current issues/initiatives in the industry (5 respondents)

IR5, IR9, AR12, AR17, AR18

### c. Projects with community/global impact (2 respondents)

IR3, IR6

### d. Strong visuals attract reader/Communicate more to the message than text

(9 respondents)

IR1, IR3, IR6, AR7, AR8, AR10, IR11, IR13, AR18

This theme of 'Specialized Content' was supported by the following key words: research, hot topics, eye-catching, breakthroughs, projects, important, community, world, impact, new, developments, and field.

Along with being interested in a people-focused approach to communicating, alumni were also desired to hear about the research being conducted at their land grant institution. Regardless of whether they had completed their bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree, almost half of interviewed respondents wanted to continue to hear about advancement made in the agriculture industry and their personal field. "[I'd like to hear about] ...the latest research as far as what projects that the U of A's working on, what projects the Bumpers College is working on

that pertain to my field or to agriculture in general (IR9). Research was a thread that not only linked alumni to their past but could also be related to their current positions in the industry.

I'm an Arkansas native, so it's always good to see what items in the state are being addressed, what are new items, what items that we've made a lot of progress on. You know college is so much about the people that you meet and you interact with so I really like seeing what the current students are working on and who they're working with in the university system. (IR5)

Two alumni in particular noted interest in hearing the community and global impacts of research being conducted on campus. When discussing aspects they liked about the *AR Culture* magazine, one alumna noted,

I like that it just highlights different things that the students are doing around the world like the guy that's looking at possibly being a part of building the golf course for the Olympic Games in 2016. That's just interesting to know that students from my alma mater are able to have that sort of have a hand in something that big. (IR6)

Hearing these stories helped alumni to see how Bumpers College continues to connect and impact their lives even though they are no longer on campus.

Finally, strong visuals were also cited by respondents as a point of entry for alumni. In discussing invitation design, an alumnus explained, “[T]he invitation design encouraged me to read the whole invitation. But as far as encouraging me to come the event,... I think that's the function of the event itself and not the invitation” (AR7). While the message or purpose was perceived as the most important part of a communications medium, the quality of design and visuals encouraged alumni to invest time in the College's message. When discussing the *AR Culture* magazine, another alumnus added, “It's got good pictures in almost every story. And I think that does a lot for reading purposes. It helps engage the readers” (IR2).



### C. Communications Medium/Channel

- a. Dependent upon personal preference (15 respondents)

IR1, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, AR8, IR9, AR10, IR11, AR12, IR13, AR17, AR18, AR19, AR20

- b. Digital content should prompt interconnectivity (11 respondents)

IR1, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, IR9, AR10, IR11, AR12, AR17, AR18

- c. Digital media can save the College money (7 respondents)

IR1, IR4, AR7, IR11, IR13, AR14, AR17

- d. Print and electronic media read differently (6 respondents)

IR5, IR6, AR7, AR8, IR11, IR13

- e. Two-way communication online (1 respondent)

AR18

The ‘Communications Medium/Channel’ theme was supported by the following key words: leisure, digital, print, published, volume, convenience, easy, and recycle.

Alumni’s willingness to receive and engage in Bumpers College messaging was dependent up on the communications medium. Over half of respondents had a particular medium preference for different types of information and this was largely dependent on personal convenience. “...I think it’s just one of those things. I like them sent to my inbox so I can read them where I want to if I’m on the computer. But I do also like having a hard copy so that way if there’s a really cool article, I can give it to somebody else to let them read it” (AR18). Although some alumni saw preference in both print and electronic media depending on the situation, others were unwavering in their medium preference. One alumna explained, “I would like to receive *nothing* in the mail. I don’t like mail[ed] items. They end up being thrown away, and then

they're just waste which I think is bad for the environment" (IR4). Essentially, alumni saw a benefit in having a variety of media at their disposal to where they could opt for a particular communications source based on personal preference.

Not only does personal preference play a role when selecting a medium, but alumni also admit to reading print and electronic news media differently. Respondents typically perceived print media as lengthy, in-depth, and needing more time to read, while electronic media was described as providing quick list of topics for scanning. An alumnus who preferred to receive *The Graduate* magazine electronically explained,

I'm more likely to take a glance at it and at least see what's in it and then come back to it later other than it disappearing on my desk or pile at home. You know the hard copy, they're nice because once I do get home and kind of settle in for the evening,... *then* I'll take the more in-depth look at it. But the electronic one, I'm more likely to read it in smaller chunks, which is the nice thing when the articles are generally small but they're informative... (IR5)

An alumna with a preference for print also described instances where the content frequency and length determined the medium/channel.

I would read a printed version—I'd always read that more thoroughly. I just like to have paper in front of me. But for just a monthly [publication], I would rather get it digital and I'll just scan through it. It's easier to just kind of glance through and click on the topics that are interesting to me. (IR11)

Clearly, some alumni were willing to compromise their personal preferences at times to ensure information was sent in the most practical manner.

Focusing specifically on electronic media, alumni identified unique benefits and presented their expectations for the College. With everything just a click away, alumni expected interconnectivity between varying electronic media including *The Graduate* e-newsletter, Bumpers College webpage, and social media presences. This caught one alumna off-guard as she looked at the mocktail party invitation and noticed it didn't have an active link to RSVP to

the event. “If I was sending someone an email or if there was a website or link for that party, I would expect to be able to click on it and it send me right to it” (Active R12). With email especially, alumni did not want to be overwhelmed with content. Some alumni (IR1, IR4, IR5) suggested linking emails to a landing page to prevent being bombarded with a lot of content upfront. In discussing the tailgate invitation, one alumna said, “I mean especially since this is an e-invite you could easily do [a little information], ‘Click here to find out more or register,’ and link directly to the website. Because then it drives traffic to your website...” (IR1).

In addition to increasing the flexibility of the media, alumni also noted that electronic media as an opportunity to save the College money ( $n_1 = 3$ ,  $n_2 = 4$ ). “Well I think that electronic form, it could probably be published more than twice a year as in it could possibly be a cheaper way to get higher volume out” (AR14). Respondents expected (but did not necessarily want) a higher frequency of news and timely content because it was available online. Along with the instantaneity that comes with electronic media, social media was expected to be kept up-to-date, active, and engaging as digital form of public relations. One alumnus who visited the Bumpers College LinkedIn page commented,

...I would think that I would be able to go and access any available jobs that alumni member’s companies that they work for may have. But whenever you go...there’s not very many members, which is understandable but... it’s just kind of like, ‘Oh, we have one to say we have one.’ Not that we’re trying to completely engage in it. I think for me, if you’re going to be on social media, you shouldn’t just say that you have a page. You should have a page that you could share and post information, where you can be authentic and engage in two-way conversations because essentially you’re creating relationships with the people on the other end that you can’t see. Regardless if it’s an alumnus, a perspective student, or somebody who doesn’t even care about U of A, Bumpers College. You still can create relationships, and connections, and get to know people because that’s what social media is about. I really think it’s important for there to be an active, engaged presence on social media. Not just a presence. (AR18)

Respondents were not content with just recent updates from the College, but wanted their alma mater to be seeking a relationship or dialog with their alumni.

## **D. Message Barriers**

a. Time (11 respondents)

IR1, IR2, IR3, IR6, AR7, IR9, AR10, IR13, AR14, AR15, AR20

b. Distance (7 respondents)

IR4, IR5, IR7, AR8, AR10, IR16, AR18

c. Unclear/Vague messages (13 respondents)

IR2, IR3, IR4, IR5, IR6, AR7, IR11, IR13, AR14, AR15, AR17, AR19, AR20

d. Overflow of competing messages from external sources (9 respondents)

IR5, AR7, AR8, AR10, AR12, IR13, AR14, AR17, AR19

e. Key message distracted by too much information in media (5 respondents)

IR1, IR4, IR5, AR7, AR19

f. Unable to relate to subject matter (7 respondents)

IR1, IR4, IR5, AR7, AR12, IR13, AR14

g. Inconsistent digital message/Technical Error (5 respondents)

IR4, AR15, AR17, AR18, AR20

h. Outdated information (2 respondents)

IR3, AR8

An emergent theme of ‘Message Barriers’ was supported by the following key words: clutter, deleting, pile, recycle, hassle, time, far, hours, interest, and no.

As active and inactive Millennial alumni began to justify their perceptions of each communications medium, a theme of ‘Message Barriers’ emerged with nine subthemes. Time was the second most frequent reason for a respondent’s inactivity with the College and its media.

Their choice to invest in content was often dependent on the time they had available. When asked the likelihood of opening an email based on its subject line, one alumnus respondent,

I guess it would depend on what I was doing at the time. If I had time to sit there and look through it, I would just open it. If I didn't [have time], I wouldn't and I'd probably not come back to open it. So I'd say the chances of me opening it are probably about 25%. (AR7)

No matter how appealing or well-crafted a subject line may be, an alumnus will not open an email if they do not believe they have time to look through it. Messages with chunks of content were often perceived as taking too much time to read, and often set aside for another time.

I always have the best intentions to read things like this because I mean I really—I'm a very proud alumna, and I'm glad I went there and I like be in the know about things. But it's just hard to keep up with time and that kind of thing. There are just so many other things to do, which like I said about my magazines piling up. I would love to read them. It's just tough. (AR10)

Another external barrier that was cited by almost half respondents was the issue of distance. This barrier was only mentioned when discussing alumni events and the possibility of making a gift of time or services to the Bumpers College. When asked which events they would return to campus for, one alumnus replied, "Well if we're just talking about me, I live four and a half to five hours away, so probably about the only thing I'm coming for is a sporting event" (IR7). Those that lived quite a distance away from the College campus cited only returning for sporting or other major events. Distance also made alumni selective about which messages they would receive. If a respondent anticipated being unable to attend an event due to distance, the alumnus would instantly discard or skip an email or print invitation. When asked their likelihood of opening the mocktail party e-invitation, one alumna respondent,

Probably not very likely because I know that if it's going to be in Fayetteville, it's probably something that I'm not going to be able to make it for. That one I might delete before I ever even open it. (AR8)

If a respondent anticipated being unable to attend an event because of distance, alumni would instantly discard or skip an email or print invitation.

Also when discussing the likelihood of engaging in Bumpers College communications media, a subtheme of unclear or vague messages emerged. If alumni were unable to understand the key purpose of a message without having to do additional research, these messages were discarded or skipped. This barrier for entry was identified during a discussion with an inactive respondent about the *AR Culture* magazine.

...[S]ome of these articles I flipped through, I didn't really know what any of them are about. You kind of have to read the article to kind of figure out what the article was about and I'm probably not going to because I'll look at the article and not know what it's about, I'm probably not going to read it. (IR7)

In addition, this theme reemerged when discussing the mocktail party subject line and invitation.

I don't know it just seems like there's no—it says “An Evening of Engagement, Networking Among Bumpers College Alumni and Current Students.” I think it'd be nice if it listed for the networking side what alumni or what businesses might be there. (IR2)

Not only was the respondent seeking additional information but missed the point of the mocktail event because the invitation lacked enough information. Rather than understanding it as an opportunity to give his time as a mentor, the alumnus was seeking ways he would professionally benefit from the event. A lack of details not only led him to misinterpret the event but see no value in attending the event.

On the other hand, too much information featured in a communications medium was also perceived as a barrier preventing the receiver from discerning the key message. Discussing the tailgate invitation's subject line, one alumna remarked, “That's way too long for a subject line. You could easily just leave it as ‘Dale Bumpers College Alumni Tailgate,’ and I'd probably open it... That's a really, really, long subject line. You lost me after Register Aug. 31” (IR1).

Digging into the invitation, respondents felt they had to continue to sift through information once they opened the tailgate invitation.

It has *way* too much information on it to be an invitation... I mean I appreciate the fact that they put that, but I feel like it could have been a lot shorter and then had a link that I could click on if was actually interested in reading all this information. ...[I]f we could've just had a link for more information, instead of overwhelming me with a bunch of information on this one little thing, that would've been better. (IR4)

On top of being bombarded with information from a single source, respondents also receive an overflow of print and electronic media from external sources that compete with the College and University for attention. This leads alumni to prioritize which messages are worthy of their time and attention.

Just like most things in this universe, it's just a 50 or 60% chance that I'd open them to be honest. And that's true with physical mail too. I mean there's a bunch of stuff that pretty much goes straight into the trash. You know, to protect myself from information overload. (AR14)

In the process of filtering information, some messages never reach their receiver.

Another barrier presented by respondents is unable to relate to subject matter. As mentioned in the in 'Message Relationship/Consumption' theme, alumni wanted to read content that appealed to their interests and history. Stories featured in *The Graduate* or *AR Culture* that had no relation to their interests were passed over for the next section. This was also true for invitations and events. When speaking about her likelihood of opening the tailgate invitation email, an alumna responded, "Whenever I think tailgate, I'm thinking football. If that pops up, usually I'm never interested in it. It's one of those things that I just kind of think football and that just goes into the trash" (AR20). While there may have been an aspect of the tailgate that could have appealed to this participant, she saw no initial connection with the event and chose to discard the invitation.

During participant interviews, a seventh barrier was presented when alumni were unable to properly view electronic media due to technical errors. Although the same email was distributed all alumni, each viewed the electronic media differently based on their email provider and screening method (desktop/mobile devices). When photos did not appear and electronic templates were warped, participants lost patience and abandoned the message. An alumna who had difficulties with *The Graduate* e-newsletter commented,

It's not lined up correctly or anything. So even on my computer screen, they didn't even manage to line up everything correctly, like with the 'E-Graduate Extras,' it's *big* and it's like outside of the borders that they put around everything... (IR4)

Instances like these reflected bad on the College as alumni perceived the creative piece as being thrown together carelessly.

The final subtheme identified by Millennial alumni as a barrier preventing them from engaging in content was 'Outdated Information.' This theme was mentioned by one respondent while reviewing the Bumpers College alumni webpage

...[W]hen you look at on the left-hand side at the 'Alumni and Friends Blogs,' you click on it and it says 'Record Crowd Attends 2011 Tailgate' and the most recent post is from October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. So I mean I would like to see up-to-date information about things that are going on, but I feel like that's not what's happening... It's completely neglected. (IR4)

Alumni showed interest in the 'Alumni and Friends Blogs' link, however content was no longer timely to be relatable for alumni.

#### **E. Need for Branding/Promotion (13 respondents)**

IR2, IR3, IR4, IR6, AR7, AR8, IR9, AR10, IR11, AR14, IR16, AR17, AR19

The 'Need for Branding/Promotion' emergent theme was supported by the following key words: knowledge, awareness, updates, active, connect, attention, and stamp.



A final theme touched upon during participant interviews was the need for branding and promotion for the Bumpers College. Although alumni were attracted by the mentioning of their university and college alma maters in subject lines, communications media distributed by the two entities had little brand recognition. Though the Bumpers College and U of A are not competitors but housed together, each send separate messages which were confused by alumni. Not only were *The Graduate* and *Arkansas* magazines interchangeable in the minds of alumni, but they tended to view the AAA and Bumpers College Alumni Society as two separate organizations.

...[E]very college has their own board for their college, and I think people get really confused. Like when Bumpers College [goes] to events and tries to get people to join the alumni society, [they think] there's an alumni society for the University and they think there's one for Bumpers College. And [that] they're two separate alumni societies... [W]e do smaller events just around our college, not necessarily around the whole university. So I think that there's some confusion between that. I don't know how it should properly be communicated. (AR17)

In addition, it was noted that the College not only need to promote their social media presences, but also ways and reasons to get involved.

One thing I do think... is letting alumni know how to get more active is important. ...[I]n the past since I've graduated, there's been many times that I see alumni stuff and it seems like the bulk of the up-front material is how to get more active in everything, but... it doesn't give any motivation of why. And those items like the events, or stories of cool things that somebody's doing right now, those are the things are just like, "Okay, I haven't been active for a while, this is really neat..." It's kind of that prompting you to get more active other than saying, "This is how to get active," and then you kind of have to think why. (IR5)

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary of Findings*

Reviewing the emergent themes identified in interview responses in relation to Clotfelter (2003) and McDearmon and Shirley's (2009) research regarding alumni giving, it appears the Bumpers College had successfully made a lasting impression on the interviewed alumni while they were still students. When discussing their connection to the College, subthemes of 'Building the Professional' emerged as alumni recalled how their time as a student provided them the skills and connections needed to be competitive and successful in the job market upon graduation. Even after graduating from the College, participants perceived a relationship with their alma mater as an opportunity to continue to develop in their current careers through networking opportunities. A few had even considered returning to the College to pursue a master's degree.

While discussing their relationship with the Bumpers College, a second theme emerged in which alumni showed 'Interest in Giving Back' to the College. Though most were fresh in their careers and unable to make a gift of their funds, time or services presently, they still hoped to make a contribution—whether to the College or directly to the students—sometime in the future. Alumni were so pleased with their experience that they wanted to offer the same advantages and opportunities to the next generation of Bumpers College students. This further reinforces the research of Clotfelter (2003) and McDearmon and Shirley's (2009) who noticed a relationship between alumni satisfaction in their education and contributions to their alma mater as alumni. By creating personal connections with alumni while they were students, the Bumpers College

has established a strong customer-product tie for Millennial alumni and can continue to develop its brand community by answering the call for a fruitful customer-institution relationship.

In addition to their relationship with Bumpers College, alumni discussed their relationship with the communications media distributed to them to maintain connections. A theme of ‘Message Relationship/Consumption’ emerged as alumni described the type of information they would like to receive from their alma mater. One alumna commented,

Even though I’ve graduated, I feel like I still want to be connected to what’s going on with Bumpers College. I feel like Bumpers College was really kind of personal with me as far as I made a lot of good connections with the faculty, and staff, and my friends, and so I want to still kind of feel that connection to the Bumpers College as a whole. (AR19)

Alumni valued relatable, familiar, and specialized messaging when receiving content and communicated a need for the College to build its customer-brand relationship to help them build on their pride or emotional connection for Bumpers College. This may in part be caused by a lack of branding associated with media distributed by the College. Bumpers College currently does not have a brand identity, so the faces of students and professors were adopted by alumni as the face of the College. Alumni were not nostalgic for a tradition or symbol, but for the personal and impactful connections (customer-customer relationships) they made while studying in Bumpers College. A theme of ‘Need for Branding/Promotion’ also emerged signaling a need for the College to craft an identity to help clear up confusion in messaging.

Participants also showed interest in ‘Specialized Content’ including compelling research visuals to “catch their eye” as they scanned Bumpers College messaging. Most alumni expressed a desire to hear about the research being conducted by the College with a focus on professors and students. The few participants who were job hunting preferred for there to be more job listings and networking opportunities featured in the communications media reviewed.

These content preferences were largely dependent on the alumnus's stage in their life and may evolve as participants mature in their role as an alumnus.

In discussing their relationship to the media distributed by the College, another theme emerged regarding 'Communications Medium/Channel.' Alumni acceptance of a medium depended largely on their individual preference, but wanted to have the flexibility to select which to receive. If the College failed to send a message through a desired channel, this often led to a breakdown in flow of communication caused by the receiver's unique attitude. Print and digital media were read differently and each came with their own set of expectations. Print media was viewed as more in-depth and involving more time, while digital media lent itself more to being prompt and easy to scan. While the *AR Culture* magazine was two years old, alumni were more shocked by the three-year-old 'Alumni & Friends Blog' post. Alumni also expected instantaneity and timeliness from digital media and were more forgiving of print. Communications that failed to encode the message to meet alumni expectations were more susceptible to noise interference and prevented the message from reaching the receiver.

Finally, as alumni justified their perceptions of communications media distributed by the College, a theme of 'Message Barriers' emerged during participant interviews. While time, distance, and an overflow of external messaging are barriers beyond the College's control, most of the listed barriers or noise could be solvable. These included vague messages, key messages buried by too much information, unable to relate to subject matter, technical errors, and outdated information. By noting and addressing these barriers originating in the message and its delivery to a specific channel, Bumpers College could foster growth in alumni involvement. When discussing the College's alumni homepage, one alumnus commented,

In the end, it all comes down to me as an individual if this is something that I want to have as part of my life... A website one way or the other isn't going to convince me. That's kind of more of a personal decision. (AR14)

Although communications media distributed by alumni relations isn't going to sway an alumnus to get active, making information available to alumni is important to help keep them connected enough to easily become active if they decide to do so.

### ***Summary of Communications Media***

#### ***The Graduate Magazine***

*The Graduate* magazine was recognized by most alumni and cited by a little over half ( $n_1 = 5$ ,  $n_2 = 6$ ), as the only information received in the mail from the College as a whole to keep them up-to-date. This finding agrees with that identified by CASE (2013) in which revealed that alumni acquire information about their alma mater primarily through alumni magazines. *The Graduate* magazine was well received by alumni as very professional and something they would like to continue receiving. Few alumni admitted reading the publication from cover to cover with most scanning *The Graduate* for relatable content as a point of entry. Seeing familiar faces was the most memorable part about recalling *The Graduate* and determined if some alumni read an article or not. Respondent's time was very precious to them, so they favored the brevity of its articles and sections such as "Class Notes" and "Bumpers College Family Album" where they could grab bits and pieces of information about the people connected to the Bumpers College. Although most said that they at least looked through the publication when it arrived in their mailbox, the theme of the most recent issue reviewed alienated alumni who had no interest or connection to the poultry industry ( $n_1 = 2$ ,  $n_2 = 5$ ). This breakdown occurred as the message was decoded and did not align with the receiver's preexisting attitudes or social system where they thrived. Although there were less of those caught off-guard by the poultry theme, the majority of

the sample happened to of either studied poultry science or had occupationally been involved in the field post-graduation. It makes sense that most would be interested in this particular theme; however, not every theme would have produced this same level of interest. Respondents did appreciate the diversity in the way the theme was presented but urged the College to make stories more people-focused and representative of the College as a whole.

### ***AR Culture Magazine***

Although *AR Culture* was not widely recognized by respondents, over half of all respondents said that they would like to receive the publication in the future. Respondents were impressed by the publication's level of quality and were attracted to the magazine's student-produced angle. Alumni enjoyed seeing photos of the students in the signature blocks and felt that it was a very personal magazine. Scanning was once again a strategy used by alumni to selectively read only relatable content, however it was a little more challenging for alumni with vague titles and lengthy articles. Even though the diverse, student-focused stories were perceived as a positive for the publication, at least a fifth of respondents saw the length of articles as a deterrent from wanting to receive or read the publication. Being a student-produced publication, there were also a few elements including text size, photo quality, and feature story length that alumni felt could be improved. These breakdowns predominately occurred in the treatment or packaging of the encoded message by the sender. Respondent's biggest recommendation for improvement was to increase the accessibility of the magazine and distribute *AR Culture* to a wider audience. It was also recommended by a quarter of respondents to possibly combine some elements of *AR Culture* and *The Graduate* into a single publication. Overall, this publication was one that Millennial alumni connected with and wanted to see become a staple whether as a standalone magazine or incorporated with *The Graduate*.

### ***The Graduate E-Newsletter***

When reviewing *The Graduate* e-newsletter with Millennial alumni, less than half respondents ( $n_1 = 2$ ,  $n_2 = 4$ ) recognized the email. While most had never seen the e-newsletter before, they liked the idea of its convenience and saw it as a way to save the College money. While the e-newsletter was perceived as a condensed version of *The Graduate* print magazine, there were a few barriers that prevented alumni from fully accepting a digital copy over the printed version. Some alumni felt that although it presented information in a clean and organized manner, it was not engaging enough to prompt interaction and thus needs a different treatment for encoding the College's message. One alumna suggested making the e-newsletter feel more like magazine by uploading the publication to digital publishing outlets such as ISSUU which provide an interactive experience and mimics the feel of flipping a printed page (AR18). This method could appeal more to alumni who prefer print media as opposed to scrolling through a PDF.

A second barrier to the e-newsletter was that the visuals were inconsistently displayed between mobile and desktop devices. Four alumni ( $n_1 = 3$ ,  $n_2 = 1$ ) had trouble properly viewing the e-newsletter depending on their mobile device or email provider. Because of the diversity in technology and email providers available to the general public, the e-newsletter is visually inconsistent. When communicating with the "always connected" generation (Taylor & Keeter, 2010), newsletters must be adapted to flexibly fit into Millennial alumni's multichannel communications (Rovner, 2013). Further experimentation must be done to avoid introducing noise interference that will deter alumni engagement.

### ***Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate Invitation***

As far as actively engaging alumni, the *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate* appeared to be the most promising way to attract alumni from all over the country for an event. Alumni believed it was wise for the College to link an event to an Arkansas Razorback football game to catch alumni who were already traveling to Fayetteville. All but four alumni were very interested in attending the event regardless of their distance to the College. Although the invitation did a good job of explaining every detail of the event, it included an overwhelming amount of content in both the subject line and invitation design. This caused the most important content—the registration link—to be buried at the bottom of the invitation. One alumna commented, “I appreciate the fact that they put that but I feel like it could have been a lot shorter and then had a link that I could click on if I was actually interested in reading all this information” (IR4). Rather than trying to fit all of the details into a single email, respondents suggested being driven from the email to the Bumpers College alumni webpage for additional information and contacts to improve the structure and consumption of the message. Despite the excess of information, the invitation did clearly communicate that it was a family-friendly atmosphere for alumni. It was suggested that invitations in the future add appeal to the email by incorporating photos from previous Bumpers College tailgates. One active alumna also felt that emphasizing that it’s a free event for alumni, their family, and their friends would eliminate a few barriers keeping alumni from attending the event.

### ***Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party Invitation***

When reviewing the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party* invitation, participants were initially confused. While the invitation was aesthetically pleasing, neither the subject line nor invitation conveyed the key purpose of the mocktail party to participants. Most



respondents had never heard or been to a mocktail party, and thus had no preconceived ideas of what to expect from the event. In addition, there didn't appear to be an incentive for alumni to attend the event held on a Thursday evening—especially for those outside of the Northwest Arkansas area. The message lacked clear content and many receivers did not possess a prior understanding of mocktail events. However, the more time alumni spent discussing the invitation, they did display understanding that it was a networking opportunity but did not fully appear to understand that it was more of a student mentoring opportunity than for personal gain (AR17). Most alumni did show interest in mentoring students, so respondents may have responded more favorably with a detailed message presented with philanthropic angle as stressed by Achieve (2013). Millennials want to tangibly see how others may benefit from their support and service (Achieve, 2013).

### **Bumpers College Website and Alumni Homepage**

Recalling the Bumpers College website's previous design and navigation, respondents were really pleased with the site's redesign. They found that it was easy to navigate and anticipate where to find specific information. Millennial alumni made it known that they do not visit the Bumpers College website unless something externally drives them to the site. Respondents seemed to only visit the site for contact information. One alumnus explained, "Typically it wouldn't just out of the blue be like, 'Oh, I wonder what's going on,' and go to it. Something else is typically going to strike my attention first through an email or such" (IR4). Currently, there is not much to offer alumni on the Bumpers College website, so it makes sense that respondents needed an initial prompt to visit the site. Of those that took the time to click through the alumni homepage, respondents perceived it neglected and lacking substance. "[A]nything that you can click on [in] the body of the page asks if you've moved recently. No, I

haven't moved recently and that's the number one story there was. Ninety-nine percent of people haven't moved recently" (AR7). According to Achieve (2013), Millennials will first learn about a nonprofit by visiting its website. While the findings of this study do not support those identified by Achieve (2013), it may be because alumni were already familiar with the College and had no need to visit the website to gather information. Currently, the College's alumni page lacks reliability and timeliness, and more attention must be invested in keeping the alumni page current and active to improve alumni's understanding of activities related to the AAA. In addition, though the College has encoded content, it is not being actively distributed through a channel that would drive visitors to their webpage. Alumni need to be given a reason to visit the College's website whether it is through email links or an events calendar.

### **Bumpers College Social Media Presences**

During the social media portion of the discussion, over half respondents ( $n_1 = 6, n_2 = 5$ ) were unaware that the Bumpers College had any social media presences. Not only had current promotion of social media on Bumpers College emails and website not reached some respondents, but there was also confusion about which Facebook page was intended for alumni. This is problematic as Millennials are more likely to connect with nonprofits via Facebook more than any social media platform (Achieve & JGA, 2012). With the majority of respondents connected through social media, there must be some clarification to the message's treatment to ensure alumni are receiving information targeted directly to them and not to current students. In addition, alumnae ( $n_1 = 1, n_2 = 1$ ) with a background in communications also stressed the need for more activity and two-way conversation on social media sites to stimulate conversation and alumni interest in the College. This perspective aligns with that of Achieve (2013), which stressed making Millennials feel like collaborators and have come to expect immediate

interactions with nonprofits (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Bumpers College must not only play the part of the source but also the receiver. This aspect of communications was not featured in Berlo's (1960) SMCR model and should be adapted to include this element.

### ***Recommendations for Bumpers College***

#### **Print Media**

Researchers sought to identify communication preferences for the College's Millennial alumni and found that a little over half ( $n = 11$ ) preferred print media. Based on the responses and emergent themes from Millennial alumni interviews, it is recommended that the Bumpers College flexibly provide alumni with a variety of communications media to help facilitate lifelong relationships. A multichannel approach to communications is normal for all generations (Rovner, 2013). The College should facilitate the opportunity for alumni to opt out of not ill-favored methods of communication to prevent messages from being overlooked or perceived as clutter. Not only would this save the College money, but allow alumni to have more control over what they receive from the Bumpers College.

#### ***The Graduate & AR Culture Magazines***

Publication preference was hit or miss depending on reading inclinations unique to each participant. The majority expressed interest in continuing their subscription to *The Graduate* magazine and adding the *AR Culture* publication. Recognizing their limited leisure-time, however, participants recommended taking the positives of each publication and combining them for distribution. Considering their feedback, researchers encourage the College to follow through with this call to consolidate its content. This publication would continue to be called *The Graduate* for the purposes of building its brand recognition and be a bi-annual release, as participants did not stress the need to increase the magazine's frequency during individual

interviews. In addition, the restructured publication would not narrow in on a specific them, but attempt to broadly cover current events in the Bumpers College. Personable elements including the Class Notes, Bumpers College Family Album, and recipes featured in *The Graduate* should be carried over and combined with the addition of one to two brief student-written stories and photos as seen in the *AR Culture* magazine. While it is encouraged that the Division of Agriculture's Division of Agricultural Communications still take the lead on *The Graduate* publication and provide stories, incorporating student work not only save time, but provide an experiential learning opportunity for agricultural communications students.

Based on the emergent themes from participant interviews, the College must also increase communication on ways alumni can become more involved. In addressing research question three, researchers found that alumni do want to help students directly through mentorships. While the College is doing well at keeping Millennial alumni updated on its progress, there lacks a clear call-to-action for alumni to become active beyond financial contribution. One alumna explained,

...[I]f I'm interested in getting more involved, this (*The Graduate*) doesn't tell me any way I can. If I'm interested in becoming a board member or joining a committee that puts on different fundraisers or events, this doesn't really tell me how I can do that. So that would be nice to have a section, and I personally know a lot of people who've said they'd like to get involved... (AR17)

The Graduate magazine was cited as the most common form of communications media received by alumni from the Bumpers College, so it is recommended that the College devotes a portion of the publication to promote ways for alumni to become active. The College currently advertises participation through monetary gifts but overlooks using this space to announce upcoming events, volunteer opportunities for the fall tailgate, and ways to connect with fellow alumni. This is currently a missed opportunity for the College and should be utilized as a call-to-action.

Finally, researchers recommend uploading the publication digitally allowing additional accessibility for mobile devices. Although the College is currently uploading the publication as a PDF onto their website, this method is not easily compatible with phones and tablets. In addition, a recent World Bank report revealed that a third of their PDF reports are never downloaded (Doemeland & Trevino, 2014). Bumpers College should not only continue to provide PDF's compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, but design an interactive, page-turner e-pub through ISSUU or folio via Adobe Digital Publishing Suite to provide users with a more natural reading experience.

### ***The Graduate E-Newsletter***

In its current state, *The Graduate* e-newsletter's execution did not meet the standards of this study's participants. Though tied to *The Graduate* magazine, alumni expected the e-newsletter to be published more frequently and concisely with timely news. It is advised that the College shortens content to not only prevent the email from being visually long but minimize scrolling for readers. Messaging must also be better tailored to engage readers in the content and all stories must be linked to either landing page or e-pub to improve the convenience of reading the publication online. The College should increase publication to once every month and limit the newsletter to three key stories. Content exclusive to the e-newsletter should be placed at the top of the template rather than buried near the footer. A greater emphasis should also be placed on social media and upcoming events and opportunities to keep alumni connected and driven to visit their online presences. Finally, all e-newsletters must be tested across multiple platforms, browsers, and emails to verify accessibility and avoid potential barriers.

## **Electronic Media**

Currently Bumpers College Millennial alumni are connected through print and email; however, are seldom engaging in other digital media because it is either outdated or not being properly promoted to where alumni are aware of other channels. In order for this to be achieved, more time and attention must be devoted to the College's web and social media presences to develop online relationships and improve public relations with alumni. While Bumpers College does have one full time and part time web developer to maintain the College's entire web presence, the alumni portion of online media has been overlooked by more pressing issues. It is encouraged that the College identify an individual who solely oversees alumni electronic relations so that connections with Millennial alumni do not fall by the wayside. This position would maintain e-newsletter and website content, post timely information to social media sites, and spark conversation with alumni online as well as troubleshoot media to combat technical errors. Currently, alumni see no incentive to connect with the College online, so having an active and engaging presence on social media and on the alumni website could improve public relations and promotion of the College.

## **Alumni Events & Invitations**

The *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate* was well-received by alumni and noted by participants as an event that attracted local and out-of-state alumni. Although few interviewed alumni had attended in the past, the event has to potential to grow based on Millennial alumni feedback. Bumpers College should continue to strategically use this event to build their brand community, communicate big announcements, and educate new alumni on how or why to become more involved.

In addition, the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*, though participation limited due to distance and time, was favorably viewed as an opportunity for alumni to give back to the College without necessarily investing money. However, the event lacked incentive for alumni attendance beyond stewardship. It is recommended that the College not only invite students but also alumni currently seeking employment in Arkansas. Representatives from companies related to the College's mission along with alumni currently employed in Arkansas should be invited to expand networking opportunities for students and alumni.

When distributing invitations for alumni events, Bumpers College should continue primarily sending electronic invites via email. Alumni perceived electronic invites as more convenient than printed, but stressed the need to communicate only pertinent information in the email with a clickable link to the Bumpers College alumni homepage for RSVP'ing and gaining additional information on the event. While a few alumni stressed the value of printed invitations, this method can be costly. It is recommended that this method be saved for intimate or specialized events, such as the mocktail party, and distributed along with an electronic invitation. Alumni are more willing to give up their time if it is perceived that the College has put extra time and care into the request.

### **Bumpers College Alumni Homepage**

Because minimal content is available for alumni on the Bumpers College website, greater attention must be paid towards revitalizing the site to attract visitors. Content recommended by participants including an alumni directory, job opportunities, upcoming events, RSVP information, reasons and ways to get involved, Bumpers College satellite locations, and alumni board information should be added and updated regularly according to alumni needs. Links such as the 'Alumni & Friends Blogs' should be removed immediately from the site unless an

individual has the time to devote to its maintenance. Last, links should be made available or given more attention on e-newsletters, emails, event invitations, and social media to help drive visitors to the page.

### **Facebook & Twitter**

When asked if they connected with Bumpers College via social media, most participants were unaware that the College had any presences on social media. Although the College is currently embedding icons into the e-newsletter, flyers, and web page, participants encouraged Bumpers College to do more to advertise these presences. Because the College's current tactics are not reaching Millennial alumni, it is recommended that icons as well as the College's URL social media extension or Twitter handle (/BumpersAlumni, @bumperscollege) be added to prominent positions in layouts when applicable. Advertisements announcing job listings on LinkedIn, for example, could be embedded in *The Graduate* and e-newsletter to drive traffic to their alumni page.

Next, confusion between the general Bumpers College Facebook page and Bumpers College Alumni page need to be solved. Currently the icon linking the alumni homepage to Facebook misdirects visitors to the College's general page for current students. This link must be fixed immediately, and all communications media should stress the existence of a separate page exclusively for alumni. Should the College fix the Facebook link, those responsible for the institution's respective accounts must decide if they have the time or are in need of an alumni Facebook page to fulfill their engagement strategies. The existing page has been neglected since fall 2013, and will need special attention to recruit followers and engage alumni in two-way conversation. Posts including upcoming events, ways to get involved, faculty and student



honors, College research, and relevant industry news are recommended to keep the page active and attracting followers.

### **LinkedIn**

In addition, the findings of this study revealed that a fifth of participants were seeking employment at the time of their telephone interview. The College has done an excellent job at matching current students with internship and employment opportunities but does not offer resources for former students—not even on LinkedIn. Per the recommendations of participants and researchers, Bumpers College should coordinate with Donna K. Graham, Director of Employer Relations for the College, to post job openings shared by Bumpers College stakeholders, alumni, and industries related agricultural, food, and life sciences. This along with consistent posts regarding upcoming alumni events, ways to get involved, faculty and student honors, College research, and relevant industry news would encourage more alumni to connect with the College on LinkedIn. If time cannot be devoted to page maintenance, researchers advise the removal of the College page and utilizing the AAA LinkedIn page for announcements.

Finally, based on the emergent themes from participant interviews, the College must increase communication on ways alumni can become more involved. In addressing research question three, researchers found that alumni do want to help students directly through mentorships. While the College is doing well at keeping Millennial alumni updated on its progress, there lacks a clear call-to-action for alumni to become active beyond financial contribution. One alumna explained,

...[I]f I'm interested in getting more involved, this (*The Graduate*) doesn't tell me any way I can. If I'm interested in becoming a board member or joining a committee that puts on different fundraisers or events, this doesn't really tell me how I can do that. So that would be nice to have a section, and I personally know a lot of people who've said they'd like to get involved... (AR17)

Researchers also suggest that motivation for involvement be increased through a personable approach in communication to make alumni feel they are supporting a cause rather than institution as recommended by Achieve (2013).

### ***Recommendations for University of Arkansas***

As with the Bumpers College, the U of A must also improve rational for alumni engagement. When discussing which media they receive via mail or email, many alumni negatively associated the University with messages encouraging membership and funding. While alumni did express understanding as to why AAA membership and monetary donations were essential to maintaining the University and most were willing to one day make a gift, they wanted some sort of rational of how they could benefit from a relationship with the University. One alumna explained his hesitation to learn more about the Bumpers College alumni society saying,

To be honest, both of my parents attended the U of A and from what I saw growing up, most of the alumni communications that they ever got was just hitting them up for *money*. I don't have a problem with that because you got to have financial means to run an institution. I just, you know, I'm just barely starting out my career and everything so all that I'm just like, 'Maybe later.' So if I can be convinced that there were a lot of social and business positives associated with it, then yeah I'd love to learn more and be a participant. It's just a barrier to entry so to speak. (Active R14)

While the AAA does provide professional benefits such as Business Hogs and Career Hogs, these benefits did not reach respondents. The AAA clearly presents ways for alumni to get involved on their website, but may not be driving alumni to their site. It is recommended that AAA continue to experiment with new ways to promote the wealth of opportunities available to alumni to convince alumni that it is worth the relationship. Though this study did not review the perceptions alumni held toward AAA communications media and their preferences, researchers

urge the AAA to draw from this study and evaluate the success of their media in reaching active and inactive alumni.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

As revealed in Chapter 1, research has shown that nonprofit practitioners see little value in prioritizing Millennials (Achieve & JGA, 2012). Because Millennials are the first generation to grow up with the Internet (Twenge, 2006), it is important to begin understanding their preferences and habits now as they likely differ from previous generations. Studies regarding alumni communications media should continue as they are often the only element currently linking Millennials to their alma mater post-graduation. This will allow alumni relations to identify and be mindful of barriers preventing the development of Millennial alumni relationships.

Secondly, researchers also suggest motivation for alumni involvement be increased through a personable approach in communication. This approach leads alumni to feel they are supporting a cause rather than institution and was identified by Achieve (2013) as an outlook Millennials displayed toward giving. Not only does this method communicate sincerity, but it also gives face to a college or university through these people-focused interactions. As revealed in the findings of this study, respondents were attracted to specialized and relatable content. This tactic builds the alumni-brand relationship by instilling an emotional connection or sense of pride for their alma mater—a core concern for marketers wishing to strengthen their brand community (McAlexander et al., 2006).

Practitioners must also ensure that strategies are being implemented to drive their tactics rather than visa-versa. Before jumping on the bandwagon to set up a Pinterest account or purchase a print advertisement, alumni relations must evaluate whether these tactics will truly

align with strategies for reaching an overarching goal. Skipping this step could ultimately spread your efforts thin and reduce the quality of successful tactics currently in place. Taking the time to strategize, practitioners avoid wasted, scattered efforts and are able to consistently build on their brand.

Last, it is recommended that practitioners utilize this study and its findings to guide future quantitative research regarding Millennial or any generation of alumni. By studying a larger population of alumni and quantifying their degree of preferences for various communications media, alumni relations may better shape strategies for sparking and maintaining relationships with alumni and select the most appropriate medium and channel needed to increase a message's visibility. Questions or statements for instruments should be structured around this study's key and subthemes in relation to specific communications media. It is advised that practitioners continuously evaluate all communications media with alumni to identify new trends and evolving the way alumni relationships are maintained.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Despite Bumpers College alumni being spread all over the world, it is recommended that future studies regarding alumni communications follow a focus group methodology for data collection. Researchers for this study ideally would have held two to three focus groups; however the planned focus group never came to fruition because it lacked a proper incentive and timing for alumni participation. A drawback to interviews is the assumption that participants have thought about and understand how they feel about something (Krueger, 1988). Some respondents during their telephone interview provided brief or one-worded answers without much elaboration despite interviewer prompts. Unlike interviews, focus groups allow participants to hear the opinions of others and build on their own (Krueger, 1988). This method

would also be a solution for improving dialog and discussion during the data collection process. While focus groups may pose respondent bias due to social pressure and anxiety, researchers could better understand how people influence their relationship with communications media and the Bumpers College. The primary researcher also believes that holding a focus group would have reduced limitations associated with the unpredictable nature of technology and people listed in Chapter 1. With the researcher and participant present in the same room, the researcher could have ensured that print and digital media would have been viewed in the same manner by all participants. Finally, this method would have also reduced the frequency of rescheduled interviews among participants.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**IRB Approval**



# UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

March 12, 2014

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Amanda Anthony Northfell  
Leslie Edgar

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 13-09-115

Protocol Title: *Alumni Communication Channels*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 03/12/2014 Expiration Date: 09/25/2014

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Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is currently approved for 50 total participants.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 210 Administration.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

**APPENDIX B**

**Initial Telephone Contact Script**



## **Interviewer Script**

**Hello, my name is {INTERVIEWER NAME} and I am calling from the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences at the University of Arkansas. May I please speak to {MR./MRS. LAST NAME}?**

[IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS PHONE, PROCEED TO 1.]

[IF RESPONDENT IS UNAVAILABLE:] **When would be a good time to contact {MR./MS. LAST NAME}?**

[IF RESPONDENT OFFERS A TIME, SCHEDULE A CALLBACK APPOINTMENT.]

- 1. Hello {MR./MRS. LAST NAME}! My name is {INTERVIEWER NAME} and I'm calling on behalf of the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology Department at the Bumpers College. One of our graduate students is currently assessing the success of current print and electronic media being used by the College to communicate with young alumni. You were recommended to us for the study, and we were wondering if you would be willing to provide your feedback during an interview at a later date.**

[IF RESPONDENT AGREES, VERIFY THEIR EMAIL AND LAND ADDRESS. PROCEED TO 2.]

[IF RESPONDENT REFUSES, TRY TO ADDRESS CONCERNS. IF THE RESPONDENT CONTINUES TO REFUSE, PROCEED TO 3.]

- 2. Do you have any questions about the study? [ADDRESS QUESTIONS]**

**Thank you so much for taking the time to not only to share your thoughts, but to help one of our students. Amanda Northfell will be contacting you via email within the next few days to schedule an interview time with you. You will also be receiving a packet of creative materials to look through before the interview. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any questions about the study. You may reach Amanda Northfell, the lead graduate on the project at [GRADUATE PHONE NUMBER].**

**At this time can I please verify your mailing address [ADDRESS IN SPREADSHEET].**

**Thank you again for your help! We are looking forward to your insight. Have a great day!**

- 3. I understand. Well, since I have you on the phone right now, do you have anything you would like me to note? [TAKE NOTES] Thank you so much for your time! Have a great day!**

## **Sample Questions and Responses**

- 1. Why are you conducting this study?**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about young alumni perceptions regarding print and electronic being used to maintain a relationship with you by the Bumpers College. We hope to adapt our communication methods based on your preferences to better serve you.

- 2. Who is funding this study?**

This study is being conducted by an Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology graduate student as part of her master's thesis. It is not being funded by any outside agencies, but the Bumpers College is funding her education.

- 3. How will the comments from this study be used?**

The results of this study will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. The College hopes to adapt its communication methods based on your preferences to better serve you.

- 4. How was I recommended for this study?**

The Arkansas Alumni Association provided use with a random sample of 1,133 Bumpers College young alumni, ages 32 and younger. Once this sample was received, the graduate student researcher identified 100 participants by selecting every eleventh individual on the list. This was done to help prevent bias when collecting data.

- 5. Why should I participate?**

While your participation is voluntary, your feedback will be beneficial to the College. We want to hear your opinion to better maintain our relationship with you.

- 6. How long will the interview take?**

The interview will last 45 minutes and will cover a number of both print and electronic media currently being utilized by the Bumpers College. The researcher will ask you about

three to four questions about each piece and will then review her notes with you to verify your responses. Your interview will be timed and will not go over 45 minutes.

**7. Do I get anything for participating?**

While you will not be compensated for your feedback, you will be making a gift of your time to the College. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us better meet your preferences and needs.

**8. Is this study really confidential?**

We are solely seeking to report young alumni feedback. All of the feedback and information will remain confidential. When we do report our results, we will use quotes, but will remove any identifiers from the study.

**APPENDIX C**

**Initial Email Contact Script**

**Initial contact via email:**

Subject: Bumpers College Alumni Study – Graduate Student Research

Mr. or Mrs. xxx,

My name is Amanda Northfell, and I am a graduate student from the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology Department in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences looking to graduate in May. I am currently assessing the success of current print and electronic media being used by the College to communicate with young alumni as part of my thesis, and you were recommended to me for the study. Would you be willing to provide your feedback during an interview at a later date?

As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a 30 to 45 minute interview. You may choose to participate via telephone or video chat, whichever is most comfortable for you. I will be sending the creative media to you via mail and e-mail for you to review at your leisure one week prior to the interview. All responses will remain confidential and will solely be used to improve our communication with you and other alumni! If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them.

Please let me know if you are interested by responding to this email. I appreciate your help, and look forward to gaining your insight!

Amanda

**Amanda Northfell**

Communications Graduate Assistant

Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

**APPENDIX D**

**Second Email Contact Script**

**Second contact via email after message left on phone:**

Subject: Bumpers College Alumni Study – Graduate Student Research

Mr. or Ms. xxx,

My name is Amanda Northfell, and I am a graduate student from the Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology Department in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences looking to graduate in May. Yesterday my advisor and thesis chair, Dr. Leslie Edgar, left message with you about the possibility of serving as a participant in my thesis study. The purpose of the study is to assess the success of current print and electronic media being used by the Bumpers College to maintain a relationship with young alumni.

As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a 30 to 45 minute interview. You may choose to participate via telephone or video chat, whichever is most comfortable for you. I will be sending the creative media to you via mail and e-mail for you to review at your leisure one week prior to the interview. All responses will remain confidential and will solely be used to improve our communication with you and other alumni! If you have any questions about the study, I would be happy to answer them.

Please let me know if you are interested by responding to this email. I appreciate your help, and look forward to gaining your insight!

Amanda

**Amanda Northfell**

Communications Graduate Assistant

Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

**APPENDIX E**  
**Print Media Letter**



February 21, 2014

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As a communications graduate assistant for the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, I hope to better understand your communication preferences and adapt our current communication methods. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us better meet your needs and maintain our relationship with you and other alumni.

This packet includes print materials which would typically be shared with Bumpers College young alumni. These materials include the *AR Culture* and *The Graduate* magazines. You will also be receiving, in your inbox, a link to the Bumpers College website and alumni homepage, *The Graduate* e-newsletter, invitations to *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party* and the annual *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*, and the College's social media sites. Please spend some time reviewing these materials prior to our scheduled interview on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions regarding these materials. Responses will be collected through note taking and backed up using a voice recording device. This study is confidential and all information gained will be coded by the researcher. The records for the study will be maintained in a private location until the study is completed. No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any report or publication.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding our interview.

Sincerely,

Amanda N. Northfell  
Graduate Assistant

Dr. Leslie D. Edgar  
Associate Professor

*This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at University of Arkansas. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, contact Ro Windwalker, the University's Compliance Coordinator, at 479-575-2208 or email [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).*

**APPENDIX F**

**Electronic Interview Materials Email**

**Final email sent to participants and included electronic media:**

Mr. or Ms. xxx,

Today I am delivering the last piece of media that will be reviewed during our interview {DAY} at {TIME}. This email includes *The Graduate* e-newsletter, two electronic invitations to Bumpers College events (*Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*, *Connecting Bumpers Alumni-Student Mocktail Party*), and links to the Bumpers College website and social media pages. Please spend some time reading (or clicking) through the content.

I look forward to meeting with you soon!

Amanda

**Amanda Northfell**

Communications Graduate Assistant

Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

**APPENDIX G**

**Telephone Interview Script**

**Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences Alumni Communications  
Evaluation**

**Millennial Active and Inactive Alumni Interviews  
Interview Guide and Questioning Route**

**[OPEN INTERVIEW & TURN ON VOICE RECORDER]**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is to determine your perceptions of current digital and print communication used by the Bumpers College as well as your preferences. I am very interested in your views and opinions because other Bumpers College alumni may feel the same way. You were selected because you are the newest generation of Bumpers College alumni, and we are working to understand how to best maintain relationships with your generation.**

**Our session will last anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes depending on the time spent with each question. If it looks like we are spending too long on a question, I may suggest that we move on to the next question, and if time permits, we will return to that question before closing our interview.**

**Before we begin, I want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers. My role is to ask questions and listen. I will be recording our session so that I don't miss any of your valuable feedback. Though I will be using your name throughout the interview, your name will not be attached to any of the compiled (or final) comments. All feedback will remain confidential.**

**We will review a variety of print and electronic media distributed by the College and ask you to discuss them. Media or a medium is the mode of communication and can be anything from an invitation to a magazine. A communication channel is the method in which a message or information is distributed. For example, an invitation to an event can be distributed through channels including email, social media, posters, and direct mail.**

**Do you currently have access to the print and electronic media I sent you?  
If so, please make sure you have it in front of you throughout the course of our interview.**

**[TRANSITION TO ICE BREAKER QUESTION]**

**Let's begin with our first question. Could you tell me a little about how your education from Bumpers College impacted your career?**

**As a Bumpers College alumnus, what do you want your alma mater to keep you informed about?**

**How do you prefer to receive your news or information?**

**Great! Let's move on to our first communications medium. Why don't we start with our print media you received in the mail?**

- What do you expect to receive through the mail from Bumpers College?
- What have you received from Bumpers College in the past?
- How do you typically read magazines? Do you read them electronically, on a mobile device or computer, or do you read printed magazines?

**Let's look at *The Graduate* magazine.**

- Prior to your participation in this study, had you seen *The Graduate* magazine before?
  - If yes, do you remember where?
    - Have you ever received an issue in the mail?
    - When was the last time you read *The Graduate* magazine?
  - If no, would you be willing to read this magazine if you received it?
    - If yes, what about it appeals to you?
    - If no, what could we do to make the magazine more attractive to you?
- What overall impression did you get from *The Graduate* magazine?
  - Overall, what did you like about the publication?
  - Overall, what do you think we could do to improve the publication?

**Great! Let's move on to the second magazine you received.**

- Prior to your participation in this study, had you seen *AR Culture* magazine before?
  - If yes, do you remember where?
  - If no, would you be willing to read this magazine if you received it?
    - If yes, how would you like to receive it? As a print, mailed version or as an electronic magazine to your email? Or is there another method that you believe would be more valuable?
    - If no, what could we do to make the magazine more attractive to you?
- What overall impression did you get from *AR Culture* magazine?
  - Overall, what did you like about the publication?
  - Overall, what do you think we could do to improve the publication?
- What is the difference between *The Graduate* and *AR Culture* magazines?
  - Would you like to receive each of these magazines or do you prefer one over the other?

***The Graduate* is a magazine produced by Bumpers College staff. Whereas, *AR Culture* is produced by students. Knowing this, would you be more likely to receive one of these magazines over the other?**

**Are there any other comments about *The Graduate* or *AR Culture* magazines?**

**This concludes the print media portion of the interview. Next we will discuss electronic media used by the Bumpers College.**

- How frequently do you check your email?
  - What prompts you to check it?
- Are you more likely to open an email based on the sender or subject title?
- What kind of news or information do you expect to receive from you alma mater in your inbox?

**I sent you an email with the subject line “New Bumpers College E-Graduate.”**

- Did you recognize this email or subject line prior to receiving it from me?
  - What is the likelihood of you opening an email with this subject line?
    - What would make you want to open the email?
    - What kind of information do you expect in the email?
- What overall impression do you get from this e-newsletter?
  - What benefits do you see to receiving *The Graduate* magazine in your inbox?
  - Are you more likely to read a digital version of *The Graduate* magazine than the printed version? Or is there another method that you believe would be more valuable?

**Are there any other comments about *The Graduate* e-newsletter?**

**Great! Let’s move on to another email.**

- What type of events would you return to campus for?
- Which Bumpers College events do you attend throughout the year?
  - What do you hope to gain from attending a Bumpers College event?
  - What type of atmosphere do you prefer?
- How do you prefer to receive invitations to events?
- How do you prefer to RSVP to events?

**If I sent you an email with the subject line “Register by Aug. 31 for the Annual Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate.”**

- What is the likelihood of you opening an email with this subject line?
  - What kind of information do you expect in the email?
  - What would make you want to open the email?
- How do you typically receive invitations to Bumpers College events?
- Do you recognize this invitation to the annual *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate*?
  - Have you attended in the past?
  - What kind of message do you get from this invitation?
    - What does the event seem to entail?
  - What perceived benefits do you see in attending this event?

**Okay, let’s look at another email invitation. If I sent you an email with the subject line “Join us: Alumni-Student Mocktail Party.”**

- What is the likelihood of you opening an email with this subject line?

- What kind of information do you expect in the email?
- What would make you want to open the email?
- Do you recognize this invitation to the *Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*?
  - Have you attended in the past?
  - What kind of message do you get from this invitation?
    - What does the event seem to entail?
  - What perceived benefits do you see in attending this event?
- How does an invitation design impact your decision to attend an event?
  - Should it look differently if you receive it in an email versus in print?

**Do you have any other comments about the *Bumpers College Alumni & Friends Tailgate and Connecting Bumpers Professional Mocktail Party*?**

**Great! Let's discuss the Bumpers College website which was recently updated.**

- Have you visited your alma mater's website since graduating from the Bumpers College?
  - What was your overall impression of the website?
  - What type of information were you seeking on the website?
  - What would prompt you to visit the website?
  - What type of information do you expect to see on the site as an alumnus?
  - What can we do to improve the website for alumni?

**Do you have any other comments about the Bumpers College website?**

**Okay, let's move on to the final electronic medium.**

- What forms of social media do you currently use?
- Which forms of social media do you visit to connect with the Bumpers College?
- How could Bumpers College motivate you to connect through social media?
- Are you interested in learning about the Bumpers College Alumni Society? What should be offered to strengthen your interest level?

**This concludes the digital media portion of our interview. Thank you again for your wonderful discussion during this meeting. I am so grateful for your feedback. At this time I would like to summarize our interview and see if you have any additional comments.**

**[SUMMARIZE AND ASK FOR ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS]**

**Now that we have completed the interview, I would like to briefly ask you a few survey questions.**

1. How long did you spend reviewing materials prior to our interview?
2. Did you receive scholarships or financial aid to complete your education at Bumpers College?
3. Are you a first generation college graduate?



- a. If no, do you have a parent or a close relative who graduated from the Bumpers College or U of A?
4. Have you ever made a gift to the Bumpers College?
  - a. As an alumnus, would you rather donate your funds, time, or services? Why?

[CLOSE INTERVIEW]

**Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me and assist with my thesis study. You've offered me with some valuable insight. I hope you have a wonderful {TIME OF DAY}!**