

THE PHILANTHROPIC MOTIVATIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE DONORS:  
A STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION OF A MID-SIZED,  
MULTI-CAMPUS COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN VIRGINIA

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## ABSTRACT

THE PHILANTHROPIC MOTIVATIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE DONORS:  
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This study examined the philanthropic motivations of the donors of a mid-sized, multi-campus community college in Virginia as part of a plan to enhance relationships with donors and increase the amount of private funds raised. Dependence on dwindling, traditional and limited funding sources leaves community colleges vulnerable and constantly struggling to fund the ever-increasing needs of their internal and external stakeholders (Sheldon, 2003). Community colleges are attempting to address the problem by enhancing their fundraising efforts and strengthening relationships with donors.

A mixed-method, multi-step approach was used for this research study. The approach in this study involved five steps. The first step included piloting the survey. The second step was piloting interviews with four current donors, three lapsed donors, and two major gift donors, and documenting the interviews with and without an audiotape. The third step included face-to-face interviews with major gift donors. The final steps were a comprehensive survey of 2,865 donors and a review of printed and electronic donor records.

The survey results revealed important demographic information about the donors. A profile of current donors emerged, demonstrating that most of the current donors are married White females at least 60 years old with at least a bachelor's degree and a minimum household income of \$75,000. The demographic information about lapsed donors revealed important

information as well. Most of the lapsed donors are married White females at least 50 years old with at least a bachelor's degree and a minimum household income of \$75,000. In addition, a demographic profile of major gift donors emerged. Most of the major gift donors are married White females at least 60 years old with at least a bachelor's degree, and a minimum household income of \$150,000.

The study also examined donor affiliations with the community college. Most of the current donors indicated their spouses did not attend the community college, they were not employed at the college, they did not volunteer at the community college, they did not participate in workforce development training at the community college, they did not employ anyone who had attended the community college, and they did not use the community college to train their employees.

Another area of interest was the impact of college communications on donors' decisions to contribute to the college. Most of the current donors indicated that the college annual report, fundraising letters, student profiles, testimonials from students, thank-you letters from students, and thank-you letters from the college president had an impact on their decision to give. In addition, most of the major gift donors noted that the college annual report, foundation annual report, fundraising letters, student profiles, and thank-you letters had an impact on their decision to contribute.

This study revealed that the philanthropic motivation profiles of most of the current and lapsed donors were Communitarians and Repayers. Most of the major gift donors were Communitarians and Dynasts. In terms of the fundraising projects the philanthropic motivation profiles would be likely to support, Altruists, Communitarians, Repayers, Dynasts, and Devouts were more likely to contribute to academics, and Repayers, Devouts, and Communitarians were

more likely to contribute to athletics. Altruists, Communitarians, and Socialites were more likely to contribute to cultural events, while Communitarians and Repayers were more likely to contribute to employee positions. Also, Altruists and Communitarians were more likely to contribute to employee professional development, and Communitarians and Devouts were more likely to contribute to facilities. The philanthropic motivation profiles that were more likely to contribute to scholarships were Communitarians, Altruists, Repayers, Devouts, Investors, and Dynasts. Repayers and Altruists were the philanthropic motivation profiles that were more likely to contribute to special events. Finally, Repayers and Altruists were more likely to contribute to student activities.

The increased focus on private fundraising poses challenges for community colleges (Jackson & Glass, 2000). The most important challenge may be the lack of knowledge about community college donors. The lack of information about community college donors results in ineffective fundraising strategies and therefore a lack of fundraising success. As a result of this study, there now exist (a) a validated survey to assist community colleges in understanding their donors' motivations for giving and (b) a donor-focused fundraising model for community colleges to use to enhance their fundraising initiatives and increase the amount of funds raised. The knowledge obtained in this study will help to address the aforementioned challenges.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, who taught me that there is nothing I cannot achieve; my husband, who believes that there is nothing I cannot achieve; and my nieces, who have seen firsthand that there is nothing one cannot achieve.

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