ABSTRACT

The following is a summary highlighting the key results from the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee’s 2019 Alumni Attitude Study and is to be used in conjunction with the final results PowerPoint presentation to reference the slides indicated.
Overview of the Alumni Attitude Study ©

The Alumni Attitude Study © (AAS or Study) is a national, multi-institution research Study that analyzes current alumni perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and opinions of their alma mater. Over 300 educational institutions have used the AAS process, with their alumni providing a rich database of comparable data to assist the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee (UWM), in the development of a deeper understanding of its findings.

There are four underlying design principles: actionable results, prioritized improvement opportunities, enhanced brand recognition, and alumni partnership.

Actionable Results
Actionable results begin with meticulous question wording, construction, and order. Results can and should guide UWM toward those improvement opportunities that would have the most impact.

Prioritized Improvement Opportunities
The true measure of a Study’s efficacy is in the extraction of action items that can be implemented to enhance alumni engagement. Properly structured research will assist UWM in identifying improvement opportunities and understanding the implications of their implementation.

Enhanced Brand Recognition
All communications represent opportunities to increase brand awareness and goodwill among the alumni population. With this in mind, it is very important to brand each survey, email, etc. as an institutional communications piece. Each specific element (logos, colors, pictures, etc.) creates powerful opportunities for an institution to introduce and reinforce their brand. It is significant to note that even among those who choose not to complete the survey, the branding benefits still increase. To better foster the partnership between the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee and its alumni, the AAS used the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee’s logos, colors, and other characteristics that are already recognizable by alumni in the email invitations and throughout the survey instrument.
Alumni Partnership

By directly asking for their input in a professional, deliberate way, UWM demonstrates to alumni that their opinions are important.

The institution reinforces its relationship with alumni by demonstrating to alumni that their input is highly valued. Implementing all elements of the Alumni Partnership Model© (pictured below) will further enhance this relationship.
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2019 Alumni Attitude Study Findings

In 2019, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), engaged their alumni in the Alumni Attitude Study (AAS) process. This is the first AAS project completed by UWM.

The following results are compiled from a total of 2,315 respondents out of the 68,338 alumni presumed to have received the survey via email. This generated a 3.39% response rate. This overall response rate is consistent with the national averages, but the 2,315 responses represent a more than sufficient margin of error on all of the questions to comfortably extrapolate these findings to the broader population of alumni. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee should be able to bolster this response rate substantially in its next AAS project by making it clear to alumni that their feedback is heard and actions are taken as a result.

Comparison Group

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s AAS results are compared to an all school average, consisting of 84 universities and colleges who have conducted this Study over the last four years, as well as a group of ten comparable institutions:

- Georgia State University
- Indiana University- Purdue University, Indianapolis
- Northern Illinois University
- Oakland University
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- University of Cincinnati
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Memphis
- University of North Florida
Demographics of Respondents

First, we need to address whether or not the UWM survey respondent population resembles the overall population of alumni. Specifically, by Era (See addendum 1), the responses ranged from the high number of 462 participant responses in the Yuppie/End of Cold War Era to 217 responses in the Electronic Revolution/Dot-Com Era (reference slide 23). In addition, the Yuppie/End of Cold Era exhibited a lower percentage of responses (20%), when compared to the all school average (21%) for that specific Era (reference slide 24). It is significant to note that response by Donor Status indicates that 401 respondents are current donors, 510 are lapsed donors and 1,403 never donors (reference slide 13). The College of Letters and Science had the highest number of responses (717), followed by Lubar School of Business (345) and the School of Education (258) (reference slide 25). Caucasian survey respondents are the largest ethnic group (85%), followed by African Americans (4%), Hispanic (3%) and Asian or Pacific Islander (2%) (reference slide 10). 60% of respondents obtained an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee and 24% of respondents obtained a graduate degree. Additionally, 15% obtained both an undergraduate and graduate degree from the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee (reference slide 10).

The split between alumni that currently reside in-state is higher than those that reside out-of-state. The data affirms 65% of respondents reside in-state and 34% reside out-of-state (reference slide 11). That being said, 54% of respondents live within 50 miles of UWM and 29% live over 250 miles away, but within the United States (reference slide 10). The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee has a marginally lower number of male respondents (49%) compared to female alumni respondents (50%) (reference slide 11), which is consistent with the alumni base in that 59% of the Post-WWII alumni are male and 55% of the Generation Y alumni are women (reference slide 12).

We presented the initial presentation, including the demographics described above, to the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee team members on August 5th, 2019 and confirmed with them that the demographic distributions above are similar to the population of all alumni. Also, we compared the response demographics with the distribution demographics and
determined that they are similar. Based on this, we believe that this response database resembles the overall population and represents a good sample set from which to extrapolate findings to the broader population of alumni.

**General Findings**

- Alumni want to know that the value of their degree is greater to them today than the day they graduated, and they want to understand what the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is doing to increase that value.
- Alumni are focused on how their degree helped them in their lives and particularly, how the degree is an enhancement to their career.
- There is a real opportunity to brand specific alumni and the Alumni Association better and more frequently on campus. Alumni want to know that other alumni and their Alumni Association are playing an important role in improving the student experience. Students seeing alumni making a difference in the student experience helps lay a foundation of lifelong support.
- The Study creates specific opportunities to create better editorial boards for all campus communications. This includes a better understanding of high value talking points, as well as the most impactful topics for articles. These topics and included talking points are also slightly different for various Eras of Graduation.
- Events offer an interesting dilemma for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. We know that if alumni attend events, there is a greater likelihood that they will give. We also know that most alumni will never attend an event. Even though most will not attend an event, the Study illuminates that they still want to know that their Alumni Association is having events and that important things are happening at that event. Therefore, communications about successful outcomes of events can be an important gauge of the success of an event, possibly more so than the number of attendants.
Loyalty & Giving

UWM alumni believe strongly that the education received from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee prepared them most for “Continuing my career path” and “Furthering graduate education,” which is consistent with the alumni base (reference slide 85). Alumni from the Woodstock/Vietnam and Post-Watergate Eras agree with the younger alumni (Post-9/11, Post-Great Recession and Economic Prosperity/Political Polarization Eras) that UWM prepared them most for “Continuing my career path” and “Furthering graduate education” (reference slide 86). Current alumni donors also elucidate that UWM did a good job of preparing them for “Furthering graduate education” (reference slide 87). The College of Nursing and the College of Health Science graduates responded with the highest levels of preparedness for “Getting a job I wanted soon after I graduated,” while the College of Letters & Science had the lowest levels of preparedness (reference slide 88).

The majority of respondents have a positive opinion of UWM. In fact, 89% of respondents rate their decision to attend UWM as a good to great decision (reference slide 40) and 91% of respondents describe their experience as a student as good to excellent (reference slide 44). In addition, 65% of respondents describe their experience as an alumnus/a as good to excellent (reference slide 56). Also, 42% of respondents say they promote UWM regularly or all the time (reference slide 48). Furthermore, approximately 93% of respondents highly regard their overall current opinion of UWM as good to excellent (reference slide 52).
More specifically, respondents rate the extent of their loyalty to “UWM in general” and “My major or degree program within my college/school” as high (reference slide 61). The extent of their loyalty for “My major or degree program within my college/school,” “A faculty member or instructor” and “UWM in general” remains higher for younger alumni (reference slide 62).

Furthermore, the data suggests that current alumni donors indicate a moderately high loyalty to “My major or degree program within my college/school” and the lowest loyalty for “UWM Athletics” (reference slide 63). The Colleges with the highest loyalty to “UWM in general” were the School of Architecture and Urban Planning and the College of Nursing (reference slide 64).

When asked “How important are these factors in making a decision to give to UWM?” the top three responses were: “Knowing how dues/gifts are used,” “Providing financial support to UWM students” and “Increasing the quality of academics” (reference slide 32). Younger alumni felt that “Knowing how dues/gifts are used” and “Increasing the quality of academics” are most important, while older alumni stated that “Providing financial support to UWM students” and “Increasing the quality of academics” are the most important factors when deciding to give to UWM (reference slide 33). Current donors believe that “Attracting high-quality faculty” and “Providing financial support to UWM students” are the most valuable reasons to give. Never donors find “Knowing how dues/gifts are
used” significantly more inspiring when deciding to give (reference slide 34). Furthermore, respondents from every College said the least valuable items that inspire them to give to UWM is “Alumni activities in my area” and “More exclusive benefits for alumni” (reference slide 35).

Alumni were asked “Which of the following prevents you from giving to UWM or from giving more than you do?” and the top reason, by a large margin, was “My personal financial situation doesn't allow me to support UWM financially” (reference slide 36). Overwhelmingly, younger alumni are more likely to agree with each reason, but the top two were: “My personal financial situation doesn't allow me to support UWM financially” and “I am paying off college debt” (reference slide 37). The majority of never donors are between “Somewhat agree” to “Strongly agree” that “My personal financial situation doesn’t allow me to support UWM financially” (reference slide 38). Lapsed donors “Strongly disagree” to “Somewhat disagree” that “I am paying off college debt” and “I don't feel that UWM needs my support” are preventing them from giving (reference slide 38). The Perk School of the Arts respondents agree that “My personal financial situation doesn't allow me to support UWM financially,” while the College of Nursing respondents had a significantly higher rate of agreeing with “I am paying off college debt” (reference slide 39).
When asked “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding your UWM experience,” respondents most agreed with “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all genders” and “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all sexual orientations” (reference slide 66). Older alumni agreed more with “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all genders,” while younger alumni were more likely to agree with “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all sexual orientations” (reference slide 67). Overall, the numbers indicated that the large majority of UWM alumni respondents from all demographic cohorts agree that “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all genders” and “UWM provided an environment that is welcoming to persons of all sexual orientations” (reference slides 66-69).

Communication

To identify talking points, we look to items that have a high impact on alumni opinion of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The item of highest impact on alumni opinion of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee is “Value/respect for degree” or equity of degree (reference slide 73). Alumni want to know that the value/equity of their degree is improving over time. Their degree is the most expensive item, in terms of money and time, that they will ever purchase and cannot sell back to someone else. This suggests why 83% of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee respondents say that “value and respect for degree” has significant or critical impact on their opinion of their alma mater (reference slide 73). This is followed or further defined by:

- A diverse and inclusive environment
- Student accomplishments
- Faculty accomplishments
Outreach to community

Equity of degree lives in current time. All four of these items are about what is going on at the campus now. Alumni understand that the value of a University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee degree from the ‘80s or ‘70s is judged on a perception of the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee as it exists today.

To better understand what alumni would like to see improved, we ask them “How important was each of the following to your experience as a student, and how well did the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee do at providing them?” Since equity of degree is in large part defined by what is currently occurring on campus, the areas of high importance and lower performance to these questions should be areas where alumni want to know how things have improved over time. They also want to know what UWM has planned, in these areas, for improvement in the future. These are good topics for articles in the newsletter and magazine that address how things are better now in the identified area than in prior years. For UWM, the highest valued topics are (reference slide 78):

- Academics/classes
- Relationship with the faculty and staff
- Skills/training for career/internships
- Relationship with other students

Another way to determine high value talking points is to see what items have a high correlation to loyalty. For purposes of this Study, we define loyalty by how alumni responded to the following four questions:

- How would you rate your decision to attend the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee?
- How often do you promote the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee to others?
- Which of the following best describes your experiences as an alumnus/a?
- Which of the following describes your overall current opinion of the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee?

Based on this index, the items that had the highest correlation to loyalty were those
based on how well the alumnus/a believes they were prepared for life, with the highest correlation being:

- The extent of loyalty for “UWM in general”
- The extent of loyalty for “My college/school within UWM” and
- How well the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee prepared them for “Contributing to my community”

The most frequently used modes of communication are “Email,” “The UWM Alumni magazine,” and “UWM website” (reference slide 92). When asked about effectiveness, as compared to importance, older alumni found every form of communication’s effectiveness to exceed importance. This was not true for younger alumni, where the effectiveness is not holding up to importance for “Email,” “Invitations to alumni activities” and “Invitations to UWM activities” (reference slide 94). Taking this in combination with their behavior, young alumni are, in effect, saying, “Please disregard the fact that I am not going to attend your event, please invite me anyway!” It is significant to note that when asked about effectiveness, as compared to importance, current donors found the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s performance remarkably effective in all highlighted areas, such as “Alumni website” and “Social media/online community” (reference slide 95). Interestingly, when asked about effectiveness as compared to importance, respondent, from every College found the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s performance remarkably effective in all highlighted areas, with the exception of the Lubar School of Business, who stated that “Invitations to alumni activities” and Invitations to UWM activities” is not holding up to importance (reference slide 96).

When asked about what they want more or less of in communications, just under 35% of alumni said they would welcome more or do not get nearly enough of “Invitations to alumni activities” and “Presence on social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.).” Also, about 34% of respondents said they receive way too much or a little too much about “Information regarding discount programs (credit cards, insurance services, etc.)” and “Solicitations for donations (annual fund, support for athletics, etc.)” (reference slide 103). Younger alumni that graduated in the Post-9/11, Post-Great Recession and Economic Prosperity/Political Polarization Eras are likely to welcome more “Invitations to alumni activities” and “Information regarding discount
programs (credit cards, insurance services, etc.)” (reference slide 105). Interestingly, never donors indicated that they would welcome more “Invitations to alumni activities” and “Presence on social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)” (reference slide 106).

Current and Future Alumni Programs

The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee Alumni Association asked its alumni “how important is it for you and alumni in general to do” various activities and “how well does the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee support alumni in doing those things?” The results show that “Identifying job opportunities for graduates,” “Serving as ambassadors promoting UWM to others” and “Mentoring students” are the top three activities of importance (reference slide 114). The areas of highest motivation for alumni, as defined by areas with the highest gap between importance and the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee support, are (reference slide 115):

- Identifying job opportunities for graduates
- Mentoring students
- Serving as ambassadors promoting UWM to others
- Providing leadership by serving on boards, committees, etc.

Younger alumni are more concerned with the activities of “Identifying job opportunities for graduates” and “Mentoring students,” compared to the Woodstock/Vietnam and Prior and Post-Watergate Eras (reference slide 116).

It is interesting to note, approximately 80% of the never donors expressed an interest in supporting the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee through “Attending general alumni and UWM events” (reference slide 117). Thus, even though they are not able to support the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee through donations, their inability to give does not waver their interest in attending alumni events and desire to support their alma mater.
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee alumni were asked “How likely are you to participate in the following alumni programs?” The top three answers were: “Attending a lifelong learning event,” “Attending an alumni event in your area featuring a UWM official (Chancellor, Coach, etc.)” and “Mentoring UWM students and/or young alumni” (reference slide 120). Furthermore, younger respondents are more likely to attend an event for reasons of “Mentoring UWM students and/or young alumni” and “Attending a career development or networking event,” while older alumni are more interested in “Attending a lifelong learning event” and “Attending an alumni event in your area featuring a UWM official (Chancellor, Coach, etc.)” (reference slide 121).

Interestingly, never donors had a significantly high interest for “Attending a career development or networking event” (reference slide 122). Respondents from the School of Architecture and Urban Planning had the highest overall likelihood for “Attending an alumni event in your area featuring a UWM official (Chancellor, Coach, etc.)” and “Attending a career development or networking event” (reference slide 123).

Additionally, respondents identified “Time/other commitments,” “Geographical distance” and “I don't know anyone” as the largest barriers to their participation in alumni activities (reference slide 125). Furthermore, respondents from institutions indicated the same barriers to participating in alumni activities (reference slide 125). It is evident from the data that one of the largest barriers for alumni participation in alumni activities is geographic distance (reference slides 125-129). Given this difference, we recommend that the Alumni Association take greater advantage of the Internet to allow alumni that live farther from campus the opportunity to participate in virtual events. A good example is this Study, where over 68,000 alumni were invited to participate in the event – Alumni Attitude Study. They filled out a lengthy survey because their alma mater reached out for their opinion. They are now waiting to hear what was heard and what will be done with this information. All of this can be seen as an
extended process or event. Another example would be utilizing social media sites such as, Facebook and LinkedIn to represent an “event.”

When asked which organizations/activities they participated as a student, “Professional or career-related organizations,” “Academic clubs or student organizations,” and “Honor Society or Honors College” have a high importance rating among alumni (reference slide 130). Younger alumni from the Post-Great Recession Era and Post-9/11 Era indicated “Academic clubs or student organizations” as the top activity they participated in as a student (reference slide 131). Conversely, “Professional or career-related organizations” and “Fraternity/Sorority” have a higher importance rating among older alumni (reference slide 131). This is important for the Alumni Association in determining where to best put its brand on campus and to make sure alumni on campus are carrying a brand identifying them as alumni. Towards the top of this list for actionable items is the fact that alumni and young alumni, in particular, want to know that the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee is taking action to improve skills and training for career. Since “professional and career-related services” are one of the main things alumni remember doing while they were students, this is a beneficial area for the Alumni Association and alumni to get involved.

Opportunity

The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee Alumni Association has asked their alumni for their time and opinions, which, in turn, produces an expectation and hope by the alumni that the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee will listen to their responses and take appropriate action. At the end of the day, the responders will know their opinions matter when they see visible signs of positive change in their alma mater.

When individuals are asked for and provide an opinion, they are engaged in a conversation: a partnership of sorts. The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee Alumni Association has touched numerous alumni through this process. Many alumni responded and provided a great deal of positive feedback. These are encouraging signs. There are also indications that several issues offer an opportunity for improvement that will have a strong and positive impact on alumni attitudes.

Institutions that demonstrate they are listening to the responses from their core
stakeholders and take action on the results are the ones that get the most value and most enhanced relationships with their core constituents. To the extent there are already planned programs consistent with these findings or other programs that are initiated as a result, acknowledge that these initiatives are in part tied to alumni feedback. This is a real opportunity to enhance that relationship and to make alumni feel they are part of an interactive relationship. A key metric in survey work is response rate. Time after time the evidence presents itself: when people believe that their opinion matters, they participate in increasing numbers over time.

**Action Items**

- **Feedback to the alumni:**
  - Via print, email, and social media
  - Repetition
- **Increase brand of Alumni Association and Alumni on campus:**
  - Professional and career-related organizations
  - Academic clubs or student organizations
  - Community service
  - Residence halls
- **Increase understanding of the benefits of being an Alumnus/a**
- **Target communications to focus on successful outcomes from events**
- **Build campus coalitions around alumni by sharing and discussing data**
- **Focus talking points and topics on**
  - How well degree prepares and prepared graduates for lifetime well-being
  - Seeing engaged alumni and hearing about the quality of the current student experience
- **What most impacts alumni opinion:**
  - Value and respect for degree (equity of degree)
  - A diverse and inclusive environment
  - Student and faculty accomplishments
- **Outreach to community**
Where alumni want to hear about the current student experience and how it is better than when they were students:

- Skills and training for career
- Academics and classes
- Relationship with faculty
- Relationships with students
- Opportunity to interact with alumni
Addendum 1 – Explanation of Eras of Graduation

Alumni Segmentation Model

Student experiences differ widely from campus to campus and over time. It is vitally important to understand these differences when communicating with or trying to engage alumni. Traditional research looks at generational differences to provide insights on segmentation. In alumni relations, however, generational differences only tell part of the story.

The relationship between an alumnus and his/her alma mater is largely defined by an event, the four to eight years that a person spent at their alma mater. This event includes the generational characteristics of the student, the environmental characteristics of the institution, and the cultural characteristics that drive the political and economic climate in which the event occurred. To account for each unique context, and in response to what the data from over 800,000 respondents to the Alumni Attitude Study (AAS) told us, the AAS research team has developed a new segmentation model for use in alumni relations based on Eras of Graduation. Below are some defining characteristics of each unique alumni segment within this model.

Eras of Graduation

Woodstock/Vietnam and Prior (1973 and Prior) This Era is primarily populated by ‘early’ baby boomers, who functioned in a more economically-safe world than did their parents. They were in school during an unpopular war and believed that they could change their country’s involvement in that war. They participated in or were influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, watched a war on TV, believed that man could and would go to the moon, and did not necessarily see higher education as the way to get started on a career and family. Liberal Arts became a more central part of the campus than ever before. Their heroes were more likely to be e. e. Cummings or Hermann Hesse, rather than Douglas MacArthur.

Post-Watergate (1974 – 1980) Alumni of this Era are a more pessimistic version of their predecessors. These students were close in age to their older brothers and sisters, but were not satisfied with merely following in their footsteps. Their student experience was framed by a more cynical climate, both politically and economically. In many ways, this group is
characterized by being between the heady days of the 60’s and the economic boom of the Reagan 80’s.

**Yuppie/End Cold War (1981 – 1993)** This is an Era of economic growth and prosperity. For the first time in many years, the hottest place on campus is the business school and the MBA is a power degree. These are the Reagan years of economic prosperity and belief in the marketplace. The Cold War is less of a perceived threat. There is an increased feeling of optimism and national pride and a renewed sense of accomplishment concurrent with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Electronic Revolution/Dot-Com (1994 – 2001)** This Era is defined by two things: the end of the Cold War (along with the prosperity and peace that its end seemed to manifest) and the emergence of the computer (and more importantly the Internet). This created the “new economy,” where young college graduates could become unbelievably wealthy starting companies that did not have to sell anything. IT, Computer Science, and Business were go-to parts of the campus. Recent, inexperienced college graduates would run all companies and no one would wear a tie in the workplace again. We were spending the peace dividend and writing entirely new economic models that did not include supply, demand, or productivity restrictions.

**Post - 9/11 (2001 - 2008)** At almost the same time, the “new economy” and our belief in “Peace Forever” ended. Economically, the party was over. Dot-Com companies were falling apart and business was reverting back to its old ways. Bosses were old and companies were conservative. An IT degree and a Microsoft Certification was no longer a ticket to guaranteed wealth or even a ticket to full-time employment. We went from spending the peace dividend to fighting a world war against an enemy we did not understand and that we could not fight in a way we understood. College students and their friends enlisted to fight this new enemy. The country at first rallied and then divided on how to best fight this new war. The political environment is more polarized than it has ever been.

**Post – Great Recession (2009 – 2014)** In late 2008, the stock market experienced the greatest collapse since the Great Depression and the job market dried up for recent graduates. Hardest hit were entry-level jobs. Many graduates, facing the prospect of no job, continued in school in
pursuit of a graduate degree. Since the job market continues to be weak through 2015, the decision for additional education has mostly resulted in higher student loans. Along with the economic chaos of the recession, the government passed the Affordable Care Act, which redefined the role of government in health care.

Economic Prosperity/Political Polarization (2015 – Current) The Era following the Post-Great Recession is best characterized by Economic growth and Political decay. From 2015 to 2019, the United States has had the largest economic expansion since World War II. This, accompanied with unemployment at less than 4%, has pushed GDP to levels of linear growth equivalent to if the Great Recession never occurred. Unlike previous U.S. economic booms, the current one coexists with political polarization that has left citizens from both political aisles feeling uncertain. In the beginning of 2019, the U.S. experienced the longest ever Government shutdown at 34 days. Social movements of “Me Too” and “Times Up” illuminated continued abuses of power and discrimination towards women and minorities. The term “Fake News” sparked a national debate on the credibility of information.