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UNITED States**Abstract:** The article discusses the millennial generation's attitudes towards donating to their college alma maters in the U.S., noting a trend of millennials' reluctance to donate to their alma maters. Topics addressed include millennials' decisions to donate to other charitable causes rather than donate to their alma maters, potential fundraising efforts aimed at millennials, and millennials' economic conditions upon graduating from college.**Full Text Word Count:** 1086**ISSN:** 0009-5982**Accession Number:** 98009657**Database:** Academic Search Complete**From Millennial Donors, Little Loyalty to Alma Mater**

FUND RAISING

KATIE RANDALL describes her recent education at Augustana College, in Sioux Falls, S.D., as "awesome." But when it came time for the 25-year-old to distribute the 10 percent of her income she budgets for giving, her alma mater didn't make the cut.

"It would never cross my mind to give to my school," says Ms. Randall, who estimates that she donated between \$1,000 and \$2,000 during the past year to causes like To Write Love on Her Arms, a suicide-prevention nonprofit; a friend's Kickstarter campaign; and community church groups. "If I can only give \$100, you get to see that go so much farther with a smaller, more-localized cause. If you give \$100 to a school you might get a thank-you note. It almost feels like giving your money to the mall."

Ms. Randall is part of a generation of millennial donors for whom institutional loyalty is not necessarily sealed at commencement, and whose attention and dollars are constantly solicited by competing causes.

New research commissioned by The Chronicle of Philanthropy found that fewer than half of millennials have made a financial donation to their alma maters. Three-quarters said that they would donate to a different organization before their college.

The study included 3,660 survey respondents, focus testing of colleges' alumni solicitations and communications, and continuing feedback from millennials on their relationships with their alma maters.

Still, many fund raisers remain bullish about a demographic sometimes derided for its love of selfies and for moving back home with Mom and Dad. The college experience remains an indelible one, they say. Millennials themselves indicate a propensity to give: Seventy-three percent of those surveyed say they will donate to their alma maters in the future. But getting them to crack open their wallets will require a new arsenal of engagement and fund-raising tactics that leverage technology, personal relationships, and storytelling in ways not yet widely seen.

"I believe that the millennials represent an opportunity for philanthropy in the future," says Scott M. Mory, associate senior vice president and campaign director at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. "It is just going to be directed to them on their own terms."

A GENERATION WITH CHOICES

There are 13.1 million millennials with four-year degrees, according to U.S. Census 2013 Educational Attainment data. Defined as those born between 1980 and 2000, it's a generation with nuanced giving habits shaped by instantaneous access to information, influential peer groups, and unprecedented student-loan debt.

It might be easy to dismiss millennials and their giving patterns. Students and early-career professionals are at their lowest earning potential, no matter the decade. Sixty-two percent of millennials who have not yet donated to their colleges said they were not financially able to do so, according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy's Millennial Alumni Study, to be released later this month.

Still, millennials are living an economic reality that distinguishes them from earlier generations of financially strapped young people, according to data and to fund-raising professionals.

A recent report from Pew Research found that 37 percent of young households--defined as those headed by individuals under age 40--had outstanding student-loan balances in 2010, up from 16 percent in 1989. The median student debt owed by such households in 2010 was \$13,000.

Steeped in consumer technology, millennials also have access to information on a scale and at a speed never seen before, giving them the ability to research and give to causes beyond traditional institutional channels, and heightening competition for donors.

"They have far more choices than people their age did 20 years ago," Mr. Mory says. "The Internet has fueled that. The growth of the nonprofit sector has fueled that. The culture of volunteerism that pervades the generation has fueled that."

USER EXPERIENCES

Attitudes and giving habits are influenced by user experiences that start with the college-admissions process and are further shaped by interactions with professors, career counselors, and alumni officers. Millennials expect good customer service, fund-raising professionals say. Yet just 14 percent of those surveyed reported that they had gotten help from career services after graduation. Forty-five percent said their alma mater's career services were unhelpful.

Alumni who reported positive experiences with university resources reported higher levels of volunteering and giving.

"A lot of our millennials are saying, 'Am I getting the job I anticipated? Am I receiving the salary that I expected after having this degree?'" says Rob Henry, executive director of emerging constituencies and online programs at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. "It is an expectation --there is something I expect the degree to do for me. When you meet that expectation, now I am willing to give back to you as an institution."

One area where colleges are falling down on the job is leveraging faculty members to engage potential alumni donors, says Derrick Feldmann, president of the consulting firm Achieve and the lead researcher on the Millennial Alumni Study. There is also an inclination among millennials to see donations go directly to students with experiences similar to their own.

A little more than half of those surveyed said they would look to direct their donations to scholarships and aid for current students, while 29 percent said they would want their money to go to a specific department or major.

"For this generation in particular, they want to know where their \$25 is going," says Brandi Brooks Davis, director of Young Alumni Giving Programs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which maintains 7,000 donor funds. "It is a big chunk of change for them."

As millennials make up a growing share of colleges' donors, fund raisers will need to adjust their messaging and giving channels to match their habits, according to the study and fund-raising experts.

Mr. Henry says that he and his colleagues have noted an uptick in the number of institutions offering one-year reunions as a means to stay connected with young graduates.

He also foresees an emphasis on small gifts made via digital tools such as the start-up tinyGive, a microphilanthropy platform that allows donors to contribute as little as a few dollars on Twitter.

Some universities, including the University of Southern California, are already experimenting with building Kickstarter-like giving channels into annual funds, Mr. Mory says.

"Every nonprofit in the country, universities, whatever, will be reliant on millennials within five to 10 years," Mr. Mory says. "They can't be dismissed. They need to be understood."

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By MEGAN O'NEIL

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