

**Alumni associations in Kazakhstan: Building the future of higher education institutions  
through its graduates**

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## THE FUTURE OF ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN

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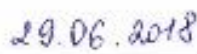
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**Alumni associations in Kazakhstan: Building the future of higher education  
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Sagitova Roza

As HEIs are becoming autonomous, the sheer need to search for new ways to overcome financial difficulties and diversify the sources of revenue becomes a necessity, not just a choice. The research problem, therefore, is underpinned by the need for higher education institutions to adapt new approaches to income-generating projects, allowing to conduct an investigation of the topic of alumni associations for them historically to serve as one of the fund-raising and networking venture at the universities of the US and Europe. Moreover, together with financial donors, alumni may serve as institutional ambassadors, student recruiters, and potential employers. Hence, this research is focused on understanding how the process of alumni associations is and how officials and students from Kazakhstani universities understand and foresee the importance of alumni associations. It is a mixed method exploratory study from which we learn the opinions of university officials and undergraduates towards alumni associations. In particular, the study was aimed to assess how university undergraduate students view their role with alma maters after graduation. At the same time, this research study examines the experience of universities which have already established alumni associations in Kazakhstan. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed differences in understandings of alumni associations between university officials and students. It was also found that while university officials are positive about the future of alumni associations, the majority of undergraduate students is not salient towards being alumni and is reluctant to take on alumni roles.

**Ассоциации выпускников в Казахстане: Будущее высших учебных заведений  
в лице выпускников.**

Аннотация

В свете реформы высшего образования о фискальной автономии вузов, остро стоит вопрос поиска новых путей финансирования. В связи с чем, следует обратить внимание на ассоциации выпускников так как, исторически, такие ассоциации выполняли функцию предприятия по привлечению дополнительных средств в высшее учебное заведение, а также служили платформой для профессионального нетворкинга в университетах США и Европы. Более того, выпускники могут выступать в роли амбассадоров родных университетов, рекрутеров студентов, а также в роли работодателей. Тем не менее, тема ассоциаций выпускников не развита среди вузов Казахстана. Поэтому мое исследование преследует две цели: во-первых, узнать мнение представителей университетов и студентов об ассоциации выпускников. В частности моя работа, используя концепцию «отождествления себя выпускником» (Alumni role identity salience) разработанной Макдермоном (США), нацелена на то, чтобы выявить вероятность построения студентами последнего курса университета отношений с Alma Mater по окончании учебы; во-вторых, изучить опыт отдельных университетов, которые воплотили в жизнь идею ассоциации выпускников. В частности, интерес вызывает история создания данных ассоциаций, а также их нынешняя деятельность. Результаты количественного и качественного анализа данных выявили существенную разницу в понимании ассоциации выпускников представителями университетов и студентов. Также было найдено, что в то время как представители университетов уверены в будущем ассоциаций выпускников в



Қазақстанда, опрошенные студенты не видят себя в роли выпускников и не готовы взять на себя ответственность в виде оказания финансовой помощи Alma Mater.

## **Қазақстандағы түлектер қауымдастығы: Түлектер - жоғары оқу орындарының болашағы**

### **Андатпа**

Жоғары білім туралы реформа тұрғысынан жоғары оқу орындарына фискалдық дербестік беру, қаржыландырудың жаңа жолдарын іздестіру мәселесі өткір тұр. Осыған байланысты түлектер қауымдастығына назар аудару керек өйткені, тарихи, мұндай қауымдастық орындады жоғары оқу орнына қосымша қаражат тарту кәсіпорынын атқарды, сондай-ақ АҚШ және Еуропаның университеттерінде кәсіптік нетворкинг билеуші платформасы болып табылған. Айта беретін болса, түлектер университеттерінің амбассадор рөлінде, студенттер рекрутері, сондай-ақ жұмыс берушілердің рөлін атқара алады. Дегенмен, түлектер тақырыбы Қазақстанның қауымдастығының ЖОО-ның арасында дамымаған. Сондықтан менің зерттеудің екі мақсаты бар: біріншіден, университеттер өкілдері мен студенттердің түлектер қауымдастығы туралы пікірін білу. Атап айтқанда, менің жұмысым Макдермонмен (АҚШ) әзірленген "(Alumni role identity salience), "түлегті өзіне ұқсастыру" тұжырымдамасын пайдаланып отырып, соңғы курс студенттері оқу аяқталған соң Alma Mater- мен мамандық қатынастар құру ықтималдығын анықтау үшін; екіншіден, өмірге идеясын сәтті өткізген жеке университеттер тәжірибесін анықтауға бағытталған. Атап айтқанда, қауымдастықтар құрылуының тарихи деректері қызығушылық тудырады, сондай-ақ олардың қазіргі қызметі. Университеттердің студенттері мен өкілдері түлектер қауымдастығының түсіну сандық және сапалық талдау нәтижелері у елеулі

айырмашылық барын анықтады. Сондай-ақ, университет өкілдері түлектер қауымдастығының Қазақстанда болашағына сенімді болғанмен, сауалнамаға қатысқан студенттер өздерін түлектердің рөліне және Alma Mater қаржылық көмек көрсету түрінде мойнына жауапкершілік алуға даын еместерін айтты.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and background of the study**

### **Introduction**

The present chapter begins with the background information of the study under investigation, followed by the research problem and the purpose of the research. It also provides the research questions that present the framework of the research and states the significance of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

As if waking up after a long dream of the Soviet history, Kazakhstan opened its eyes to see the modern globalized world and found itself in the middle of nowhere. Estranged from the Soviet past and lagging from the modern globalized world the country realized the need for transformations to adapt to new realities. That period of Kazakhstani history McLendon (2004) describes as the state of “turbulence and reform” (p. 276), as after the collapse of the Soviet Union the country has undergone major economic, political and social changes. The leader of the nation in the annual addresses to the People of Kazakhstan has often set the priorities of goals and objectives, necessary to improve national economy and social prosperity in the age of globalization. However, during the first decade of independence, the development of the education sector was not in the priority agenda, as Yakavets (2014) claims “until the end of the 1990<sup>th</sup>, educational reforms had an incidental, fragmentary nature and were largely unsupported by any scientific programme of research” (p. 20). For the first time, the necessity of systemic changes in the education system was emphasized by President Nazarbayev in the Address to the Nation from 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2004. Since then and until now the vast majority of reforms have been introduced into all levels of education systems under the Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter MES), which “emerged as the key

governmental organization responsible for higher education reforms” (Hartley, Gopaul, Sagintayeva, & Apergenova, 2016, p. 5). These reforms in higher education include the transition to the three-tier education system, consisting of bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and PhDs, and creation of a national education quality assessment system (Kukeyeva, Delovarova, Ormysheva, & Davar, 2014). Another major reform in higher education is connected with the Bologna Process as in 2010 Kazakhstan signed the Bologna Declaration and became part of the European Educational Community. This has brought about another set of reforms into the system of tertiary education including the transition of higher educational institutions (hereinafter HEIs) to institutional autonomy. The OECD report on Higher Education in Kazakhstan (2007) asserts that autonomy is necessary for universities to function and emulate in a market economy while recommending all accredited HEIs to enjoy the right to organize their programmes, improve governance, manage their budgets and create other fund-raising projects. At the same time, there is a concern that Kazakhstani universities are not ready yet for fiscal autonomy as the major source of universities’ funding is the government. According to the national survey conducted by JSC Information-Analytical Center in 2014 in public universities, HEIs are more prepared to the introduction of autonomy in academic sphere (72.4%) and least prepared to the introduction of fiscal autonomy (56.2%) (p. 25). The respondents further explain that universities are not ready for institutional autonomy because of the weak financial environment (8.8%) (Information Analytical Center, 2014). Likewise, the study by Sagintayeva and Kurakbayev (2015) revealed the concern of their participants, e.g. senior administrators, middle managers and faculty members that they will not be able to survive without government financial support, due to the absence of experience in fund-raising businesses. One of the participants emphasized, “we have not reached such a stage when we could earn money as top universities like Harvard and MIT” (as cited in Sagintayeva &



Kurakbayev, 2015, p. 207). Obviously the majority of public HEIs are reluctant to become financially autonomous and take the responsibility of managing their budgets. Then, another question comes out: What are the underpinning reasons for such concerns?

Probably, the main reason lies in the fact that MES defines strategic priorities and provides funding as well as the drafts of education budget (Yakavets, 2014) thus putting HEIs into limits drawn by MES. Moreover, the existing budgeting system, e.g. line-item budgeting, “focuses on percentage adjustments (increments) to the existing base budget rather than on specific priorities” (Zierdt, 2009, p. 345-346). In other words, specific priorities of HEIs are not considered, and they cannot get or spend more than they received on particular needs defined by MES. As stated by Abdrasheva (2016) Kazakhstani HEIs can independently manage only 20% of state funds. Seemingly, the existing budgeting system itself hinders HEIs from taking the responsibility of managing their budgets and, what is more important, from being creative in income-generating businesses. However, it is still the responsibility of a university to generate income and diversify its sources of finances. Though Kazakhstani HEIs rely mostly on governmental revenue sources as well as tuition fees, the world practice shows that there are many other sources of revenue which, according to Johnstone (2002), include contract research, teaching high demand courses, sale or lease of university assets, and donations. Besides economic rationales underpinning the necessity to develop alumni associations at HEIs in Kazakhstan ‘the establishment and nurturing of mutually beneficial relations between a university and its alumni as a primary stakeholder group, should be a top priority for any higher education institution that wants to prosper and grow in a fast-changing and highly competitive market’ (Barnard & Rensleigh, 2008, p. 433).

**Research Problem**

As HEIs are becoming autonomous, the sheer need to search for new ways to overcome financial difficulties and diversify the sources of revenue becomes a necessity, not just a choice. The research problem, therefore, is underpinned by the need for higher education institutions to adapt new approaches to income-generating projects, allowing to conduct an investigation of the topic of alumni associations for them historically to serve as one of the fund-raising and networking venture at the universities of the US and Europe. The statistics show that 25, 6 billion dollars constituted voluntary contributions to colleges and universities in the US in 2004-2005, while 27% of Higher Education support came from alumni (Levine, 2008). Moreover, together with financial donors, alumni may serve as institutional ambassadors, student recruiters, and potential employers, while development of the university's alumni database is seen as "an investment in the institution's infrastructure to maintain contact with alumni" (Gallo, 2012, p. 45). Therefore, it is a timely issue worth to be investigated within the Kazakhstani context, as yet apparently no research has been conducted on this topic in Kazakhstan. The results of the study will benefit university officials when considering new approaches to fund-raising activities, as well as students, for whom alumni associations may become the platform for field networking and employment.

**Research Purpose**

This research study is two-fold. It is a mixed method exploratory study from which we learn the opinions of university officials and undergraduates towards alumni associations. In particular, the study is aimed to assess how university undergraduate students view their role with alma maters after graduation. At the same time, this research study will examine the experience of universities which have already established alumni associations in Kazakhstan. As a result, several questions emerge that present a framework for this research.

## **Research Questions**

For the purpose of this study the following overarching research question and subsidiary questions were developed:

Overarching research question:

Given current policies and reforms in Kazakhstani higher education, how do university officials and students understand and foresee alumni associations in Kazakhstan?

Subsidiary questions:

1. What is the probability that university undergraduates would build a relationship with the university after graduation?
  - 1.1: What are the university experiences of senior students?
  - 1.2: Which demographics and experience variables contribute to alumni identity salience and students' alumni role expectations?
2. How do university officials understand alumni associations?
3. How are alumni associations organized and managed in the selected universities that have an alumni association?
4. What is the difference in opinions between university officials and students towards alumni associations?
5. What lessons can be learned from universities that have established alumni associations?

## **Significance of the Study**

The present paper contributes to the understanding of the alumni associations by university officials and undergraduates within the Kazakhstani context. It also fills the gap in the existing literature. Moreover, the findings of the study will communicate some tangible recommendations to higher education institutions in Kazakhstan regarding the creation and

maintenance of alumni associations. In addition, the study is significant for undergraduate students who may start seeing membership in alumni associations as a platform for field networking and increased career opportunities.

### **Summary**

Having presented the background of the study and the rationale underpinning the research interest of the topic under investigation, the thesis is then structured in the following order:

Chapter 2 discusses the body of literature on alumni associations which involve the results of the previous studies and concepts developed by scholars in the relevant field.

Chapter 3 is a methodology section which presents the researcher's philosophical worldview, research design, research instruments, sampling and data analyses procedures followed by the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 reveals the main and interesting findings which shed light on students' attitudes towards alumni associations and the experiences of established alumni associations in Kazakhstani HEIs.

Chapter 5 communicates quantitative and qualitative findings in regard to the analyzed literature to provide in-depth analysis of the research results.

Chapter 6 provides concluding remarks for the study and recommendations for HEIs to develop new and enhance existing alumni associations.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

There is a vast body of literature of American origin which is devoted to the topic of alumni associations. This can be explained by the extreme popularity of alumni associations in the US where millions of dollars are raised every year from alumni donations (Vieregge, Robinson, & Drago, 2013). Recently, growing interest has emerged among European universities. In particular, the literature shows that the majority of European universities are developing alumni associations in attempts to diversify their income (Gallo, 2012; Daly, 2013), while American universities, with established culture of alumni associations, are looking for ways of improving alumni giving indexes (see Levine, 2008; Khanfar, Swaidan, & Mujtaba, 2009; Borden, Shaker, & Kienker, 2013). As a result, the majority of literature on alumni associations is of American origin and is focused on factors predicting alumni giving. At the same time, there are authors who view alumni not only as university donors, but as public workers (Osborne, Alkezweeny, & Kecskes 2015), institutional ambassadors and potential employers (Galo, 2012). The literature of special interest for the present research scrutinizes more intangible variables such as student/alumni expectations and satisfaction (Vieregge, Robinson, & Drago, 2013; Coll & Tsao, 2005; Brady et al., as cited in Levine, 2008), preferences (Khanfar, Swaidan, & Mujtaba, 2009), motivation and experience (Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007; Coll & Tsao, 2005), alumni role identity (McDearmon, 2012), affinity with the institution (Gallo, 2012), relationship with alma mater (Gaier, 2001) and others. In order to comprehensively present the existing literature, I grouped the studies under the following themes: communication and alumni giving, alumni demographics, student/alumni experience, and alumni-related concepts. However, before discussing these themes, it is vital to understand the nature of alumni associations.

**Alumni associations**

Though first alumni network dates back 200 years (David & Coenen, 2014), it is still problematic to find an explicit definition or explanation of an alumni association. Surprisingly, among 28 articles related to the topic of alumni association, only one has attempted to understand its nature. Thus, Vieregge, Robinson, and Drago discuss alumni association in terms of social and business networks (2013). The authors assert that it is inherent in human nature to be a part of a network or a social group. Vieregge, Robinson, and Drago (2013) distinguish between social networks and business networks by stating that social networks are naturally arising networks, while business networks are artificially created ones. However, both kinds of networks are characterized by certain amenities and obligations as well as advantages and disadvantages. To describe university alumni networks, the authors cite Balke, Mut, Stoop and Strattman (2006) who see alumni networks as the coalescence of students, graduates and employees (as cited in Vieregge, Robinson & Drago, 2013 ). To define the purpose of this social group, the authors refer to Seebacher and Klaus (2005) who defined it as the promotion of social, political and career networks as well as fund-raising for the university's endowment (as cited in Vieregge, Robinson & Drago, 2013 ).

Following all of the above stated, it is possible to conclude that alumni association is a social network, which bears the characteristics of a business network where students, graduates, and employees merge to promote social, political and career networks while raising funds for universities.

**Communication and alumni giving**

Even though there is little written to define alumni associations, there are other studies which contribute to the understanding of the complex nature of alumni associations, their performance, and alumni motivation to become part of such associations. Thus, one group of

studies investigates alumni communication strategies. There is a significant correlation between communication tools, acknowledgment programs, and alumni giving behavior, supported by the studies of Levine (2008), Quingley, Bingham, and Murray (2002), Sun, Hoffman, and Grady (2007), and others. The study by Quingley et al. (2002) shows that the standard acknowledgment procedures (procedures informing alumni about their donations being received and expressing the institution's appreciation for the gift) result in a higher giving rate among alumni, while more frequent communication may decrease alumni contributions. Though the frequency of communication does not increase alumni donations, personal messages, signed by a significant person in the university, has a positive impact on alumni giving. The benefits of a personal appeal are also highlighted in studies by Coll and Tsao (2005), and Nickols (as cited in Levine, 2008). However, it is a time- and cost-consuming way of communication as a result, direct mail is used instead (Levine, 2008). Together with Quingley et al., Levine did not find a significant correlation between the number of communication pieces and alumni giving but found that specific communication pieces, like alumni magazines, contributed to higher participation rate among alumni. To sum up their findings, alumni solicitations may be increased if alumni fund-raisers and university administration "create a comprehensive communication strategy to reach alumni" (Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007, p. 307). These findings assisted in creating interview questions for the qualitative part of the study.

### **Alumni demographic**

Another group of studies investigates the correlation between demographic variables and alumni giving. These variables include age, gender, race, major, socio-economic status, and others. For instance, the study by Belfield and Beney (2000) found that age, gender, and income affect the size and probability of alumni donations. In particular, they found that

females are more likely to donate money, but males donate more. Single alumni donate more than married ones and the higher the age of the alumni the higher the probability of alumni giving. Le Blanc and Rucks (2008) would concur Belfield and Beney's general claim, but still, question the impact of marital status on alumni giving. They found that married but older alumni may contribute more to their alma mater. Moreover, the analysis of 33 thousand university alumni records in the US showed that the most generous donors among alumni are white males who graduated between 1930 and 1959 and received major in engineering (Le Blanc & Rucks, 2008). Other studies reveal that majors in business, medicine, law and academic majors are significant predictors of alumni giving (as cited in Okunade & Berl, 1997). To conclude this group of findings in the US it is possible to assert the prospective alumnus/alumnae donor to be a wealthy middle-aged female or male who majored in prestigious specialties. Though in the American context it is possible to draw the image of a prospective alumnus/alumnae donor, in Kazakhstan it is still unclear who those potential alumni donors may be. Nevertheless, these findings were helpful at the stage of data analysis when comparing my research findings with those from the US.

### **Student/alumni experience**

Another part of the literature scrutinizes the effect of graduate/alumni experience and satisfaction on alumni giving and participation. Some authors use these notions interchangeably, and whenever they speak about student/alumni experience, they speak about their level of satisfaction with student life or services provided by alumni associations. In the present study, I refer to the experience which is conceptualized by Koenig-Lewis (2016) as "students' *recollection* of their involvement in academic and social activities while at university" (p. 61). Gaier (2001) asserts that "the college experience is comprised of a multiplicity of student factors, which directly influences the satisfaction with the



undergraduate experience” (p. 16). According to Sun et al. (2007), such factors are the quality of education, relationships with the faculty and academic performance. Coll and Tsao (2005) support their claims reporting that the satisfaction with the quality of educational programs contributes to alumni donations. Moreover, according to Stanford University News Service report (1994) the graduate satisfaction with the undergraduate experience is the only significant predictor of alumni giving (as cited in Khanfar et al., 2009), that is to say “the more satisfied alumni were as students, the more likely they were to be generous donors tomorrow” (Levine, 2008, p. 180). Such undergraduate experiences like involvement in clubs, sports sections, favorable interaction with the faculty also contribute to student/alumni satisfaction with the university experience and increase the probability of alumni interest in and support of alma mater. These findings assisted when defining variables and constituting survey questions for the quantitative part of this research.

### **Alumni and related concepts**

The above-presented literature on alumni associations investigates factors influencing alumni giving. As a result, the studies are focused on communication tools, demographic characteristics, or undergraduate experience contributing to alumni giving behavior. Nevertheless, there are studies which are delving deeper into the issue by developing and/or proposing various concepts. Some of the concepts include those related to the life-long relationship between alumna/alumnus and alma mater (Gallo, 2012; 2013), discretionary collaborative behavior (Heckman, & Guskey, 2015), alumni loyalty (Iskhakova, Hilbert, & Hoffman, 2016), and alumni identity salience (McDearmon, 2012).

**Life-long relationship**

In her studies, Maria Gallo (2012; 2013) sought to gain deeper understanding of the alumni-academy relationship thus developing the alumni relationship-building cycle. According to the author, when entering a university, a freshman is involved in a unique relationship with the university. Then, after graduation, this relationship undergoes various stages of the relationship building process, and while some alumni occupy one particular position in these relationships, others terminate them (Lippincott, n.d., as cited in Gallo, 2013, p. 1152). Gallo distinguishes four stages of the alumni relationship building cycle as affiliation, affinity, engagement, and support (2013).

Affiliation stage is a pro-active stage when graduates are connected to the university through the degree received, or through involvement in sport, social, cultural and other activities (Gallo, 2013). This stage is rather important as the experience gained within this stage can influence involvement in subsequent stages.

Affinity stage is an inactive or reactive stage, when alumni forge ahead, being seized by the outside world while losing ties with the alma mater (Gallo, 2013). This is the stage when alumni associations have to communicate with the alumni by informing them about changes happening in the university, faculty achievements or social events, to “build or re-build the affinity and nostalgia in the institution” (Gallo, 2013, p. 1153). This is where effective communication strategies discussed above<sup>1</sup> can reanimate alumni-academy relationship.

Engagement stage is an active stage when alumni start participating in university events such as reunions, networking events or special interest groups (Gallo, 2013). Gallo argues that

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<sup>1</sup> See Communication and alumni giving

alumni would not proceed to this stage without communication work done at the affinity stage (2012).

Final stage - support stage - is an interactive stage characterized by alumni philanthropic intentions to give back to the institution by donating money or doing volunteer work (Gallo, 2013). This is the stage at which institute reaps the fruits of labors.

### **Discretionary collaborative behavior**

Like Gallo, Heckman and Guskey (1998) examined the long-term relationship between alumni and universities. However, the authors focused on the engagement stage of the relationship building cycle by applying marketing principles to the higher education setting. Heckman and Guskey claim that “relationship marketing” (1998, p.97) is relevant to alumni/university relations where alumni could be treated as customers and university as a seller. In particular, they applied the concept of discretionary collaborative behavior (hereinafter DCB) which is defined by authors as:

Behavior performed by a customer in order to help a vendor, company, or institution, which contributes to the effective functioning of the relationship, which is outside formal contractual obligations, and is performed without expectation of direct reward (as cited in Heckman and Guskey, 1998, p. 98).

In other words, the discretionary behavior is an extra-role behavior which is not required, recognized or rewarded by any formal entities. According to the authors, the DCB concept can be applied to the alumni/university relationship because alumni perform a similar behavior when participating in university campaigns, talking to prospective students (customers), providing employment opportunities, and what is more important when becoming a word-of-mouth influencer of family, friends, and acquaintances. Heckman and Guskey

distinguish between collaborators and contributors as the latter provide material help. At the same time, DCB could be performed by the university. Whether performed by alumni or university DCB contributes to an effective relationship (Heckman, & Guskey, 1998).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that in order to build a healthy collaborative relationship both alumni and university should perform a discretionary behavior which goes beyond formal obligations.

### **Alumni loyalty**

Another widely discussed concept in the international literature is alumni loyalty.

Numerous studies, conducted every year, are devoted to the topic of alumni loyalty supported by the increased interest in the topic by universities (Iskhakova, Hoffman, & Hilbert, 2017).

Nevertheless, until recently there was no consistent definition of alumni loyalty as different scholars view the concept in their particular way. Furthermore, some of the studies examining variables constituting alumni loyalty had contradictory results (Iskhakova, Hoffman, & Hilbert, 2017). The more multi-faceted approach to define alumni loyalty was made by Iskhakova, Hoffman, and Hilbert who developed an integrative model of alumni loyalty (2016) and conducted a systematic literature review on the topic (2017). As a result, the authors proposed the following definition: “Alumni loyalty is the faithfulness or devotion of alumni, based on two interrelated components: attitudinal (intention to alumni loyalty) and behavioral (action loyalty)” (Iskhakova, Hoffman, & Hilbert, 2017, p. 29). Intention to alumni loyalty is described as a desire to perform certain behavior, while action loyalty is an active stage at which certain behavior is performed. This definition strongly resembles the concept of alumni loyalty proposed by Koenig-Lewis (2016), who also distinguished between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. The authors then explain that intention to alumni loyalty and action

loyalty could be expressed both materially and non-materially thus resembling the study by Heckman and Guskey (1998) who distinguished between collaborators (non-material help) and contributors (material help). Moreover, the authors found a close relationship between benefits offered by an alumni association, predisposition to charity, perceived quality of service provided by the institution, and the degree of loyalty displayed by alumni toward alma mater (2016).

### **Alumni role identity**

One more concept related to the topic of alumni associations was proposed by McDearmon (2012) who investigated alumni role identity. He created the instrument which fits the conceptual framework of Stryker's symbolic interactionism. Stryker developed the concept of identity salience, which is defined as the "readiness to act out the behaviors expected for a particular role which formulates identity" (McDearmon, 2012, p. 287). In other words the social roles we play form our identity, and we act in accordance with this identity. This notion was then transferred, and adopted to alumni role identity by McDearmon. He then applied other conceptual frameworks to define dimensions of alumni role identity. Thus McDearmon distinguished three dimensions of alumni role identity such as alumni identity salience, alumni role expectations, and social expectations of alumni. Two of the presented dimensions, alumni identity salience, and alumni role expectations, are of research interest for the present study. The social expectations dimension is unable to fit the present research due to the novelty of alumni role for Kazakhstani society. In other words, there are not yet social expectations of a person to be alumnus(a). On the contrary, there are alumni institutional expectations (alumni role expectations) which could be assessed in the present research. Moreover, McDearmon found that alumni identity salience is correlated with alumni role

expectations as those who had salient identity toward the role of an alumnus(a) the more likely they were to utilize the expectations of that role. His findings also revealed that “those who responded higher on the role alumni identity salience scale towards being an alumnus or alumna, more frequently engaged in the support behaviors” (p. 299). Strictly speaking, people who accept a role of alumnus(a) are potential alumni donors because the higher the role salience of the person the higher the probability that the person will act in accordance with the role for which he or she was assigned. However, his study did not investigate what kind of experience would increase or decrease alumni role identity. Following this, the present research investigates which undergraduate experience contributes to greater alumni identity salience, and their readiness to take on different alumni roles.

### **Summary**

The present literature review revealed the variety of concepts related to the topic of alumni associations as well as articles of practical interest for universities. However, despite the variety of the literature on the topic of alumni associations, there is an issue which runs like a golden thread through the articles, i.g. the importance of undergraduate experience for the continuous relationships between alumni and alma mater. The pleiad of authors, such as Gaier (2001), Call and Tsao (2005), Sun et al. (2007), Levine (2008), Khanfar et al. (2009), Gallo (2012), McDearmon (2012), Koenig-Lewis (2016), Iskhakova, Hoffman and Hilbert (2017), in different years, spoke about the impact of student experience on alumni-university relationships. Thus, Gallo (2012) stresses the importance of experience gained at affiliation stage for relationship building cycle; Gaier (2001) determines the factors comprising university experience, while McDearmon (2012) suggests university experience to affect alumni role identity. Similarly, Iskhakova, Hoffman, and Hilbert (2016), as well as Koenig-

Lewis (2016) claim that satisfaction with student experience (named by authors as academic and social integration) contributes to alumni loyalty.

However, due to the complexity and multilevel of alumni-university relationships not only undergraduate experience that influences these relationships, but the variety of other factors such as demography (Okunade & Berl, 1997; Belfield & Beney, 2000; Le Blanc & Rucks, 2008), alumni communication strategies (Quingley, Bingham, & Murray, 2002; Sun, Hoffman, & Grady, 2007; Levine, 2008), and discretionary behavior performed by university (Heckman & Guskey, 1998; Gallo, 2012; Iskhakova, Hoffman, & Hilbert, 2016) were identified.

These literature review findings justify the investigator's research interest in students' background, and undergraduate experience (quantitative part), as well as university discretionary behavior (qualitative part) which will be assessed for the purpose of the present study.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The following section provides information on the researcher's philosophical worldview which drives the methodology of the present study, followed by the research design, sample, site, instruments, and materials. It also presents data analyses procedures and limitations of the study.

#### **Research Paradigm**

The philosophical basis of this study is presented by a pragmatic worldview which drives the choice of the mixed methods inquiry. Pragmatism which derived from the work of Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey (Creswell, 2009) heralded the end of the paradigm war and the emergence of mixed methods by stating that qualitative and quantitative methods are actually compatible (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 4). In contrast to post-positivist and social constructivist worldviews, which perceive the reality as something "independent of the mind or within the mind" (Creswell, 2009, p. 11), pragmatism perceives the reality as something experienced or tested. The key question for pragmatists is "does it work?" As a result, pragmatist researchers utilize the variety of approaches for collecting and analyzing data in order to get the deeper understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2009). In other words, pragmatists use pluralistic approaches typical of mixed methods inquiry as it combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. Driven by the pragmatic worldview of the researcher this study is therefore employed mixed methods design which will be further explained in details.

#### **Research design**

One of the main aims of the study is to understand whether the idea of alumni associations is applicable within the Kazakhstani context. Therefore, it is necessary to define students' readiness to build life-long relationships with a university while learning from the



experience of Kazakhstani HEIs with established alumni associations. Framed by the two-fold nature of the study, the research applies mixed methods design to answer the main research question. As stated by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), Morgan (2007), and Patton (1990) mixed methods research is used when a researcher focuses on a research problem rather than on research methods for the purpose of deriving knowledge about the problem. As apparently the problem of alumni associations in Kazakhstani HEIs has not been yet investigated, the present study, therefore, aims to derive knowledge about this problem by applying mixed methods design. Being defined as a type of inquiry which combines both qualitative and quantitative research elements to reach the breadth and depth of the problem under investigation (Johnson et al., 2007) the mixed methods design is therefore thought to fit the best the purpose of this study.

There are six types of mixed methods procedures, distinguished by Creswell, which are contingent on four factors: timing, weighing, mixing, and theorizing (2009). In terms of timing, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered roughly at the same time when the researcher was in the field collecting data. In regard to weighing, the present study grants equal priority both to qualitative and quantitative data. The mixing of the data happens in the form of connecting survey and interview findings to answer the main research question. Regarding theorizing, the quantitative part of the survey is guided by the conceptual framework of McDearmon's alumni role salience, no other theories or frameworks are applied in qualitative part of the study. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the present study employs concurrent mixed methods design which bears the characteristics of both concurrent embedded strategy (both qualitative and quantitative methods are used study different groups or levels) and concurrent transformative strategy (the two types of data may have equal or unequal priority).

One ‘strand’ of the present work aims to define students’ readiness to build a life-long relationship with the university by determining students’ salience to becoming an alumnus/a. For this reason, the quantitative method is employed. As asserted by Creswell (2002), quantitative data “can provide useful information if you need to describe trends about a large number of people” (p. 535) such as student population in the present study.

Another ‘strand’ of the present work aims to learn the experience of Kazakhstani HEIs with established alumni associations. Due to the absence of the research on the topic of alumni associations in Kazakhstani HEIs, it was relevant to use a qualitative descriptive study as “qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334). Sandelowski also suggests that qualitative descriptive study is especially useful when an enquirer wants to know who, what, and where of the events (2000, p. 339). Given the fact that the present study aims to describe the experience of Kazakhstani HEIs with operating alumni associations, the fundamental qualitative descriptive design is thought to fit the best the purpose of this research.

### **Sample**

The survey participants were randomly sampled from the number of undergraduate senior class students. There are several reasons which identified this choice. First of all, because the departments of alumni associations are not common for Kazakhstani HEIs, it would be difficult to access alumni records and invite alumni to participate in the research. Secondly, senior students are the closest to becoming alumni, and thirdly, by the senior year, they already have enough academic and social experience to be able to answer all survey questions and provide sufficient data.

The senior student population was reached when the researcher was in the field collecting the data. Over the half of the respondents (78) filled in hard copies of the survey,

while the rest of them filled in an online form (75). It was difficult to reach 4<sup>th</sup>-year students because during the phase of data collection almost all of them were out of their universities because of the internship. Therefore, an online survey was distributed among university administration to be further forwarded to senior students. Though the planned number of survey participants was 500, in total of 153 students participated in the survey which constitutes 30, 6 % of the response rate. Among them are 91 females (59%) and 62 males (41%) the majority of which are aged from 18 to 21 (131).

The participants of the qualitative part of the study are selected using purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling, which is a feature of qualitative research, is used when it is necessary to reach ‘knowledgeable people’, in other words, those who by virtue of their professional role, power, or access to networks can provide in-depth knowledge about particular issues (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). For the purpose of the present study, it is necessary to access people with understanding and knowledge about alumni/alumni associations in their HEIs. Therefore, university administration of the universities with established alumni associations, those working closely with alumni and/or alumni associations was selected as the participants of present research. Gender or nation factors were not critical at this point because it was more about participants’ professional experience rather than demographics.

Concurrent with survey participants, interview participants were reached when the researcher was in the field. Due to a purposeful sampling of the population, interview participants were mostly higher education professionals with working experience ranging from two to forty years, some having both teaching and administering experience. The total number of participants constitutes 19 people among which 13 were interviewed individually, and six interviewees participated in focus group discussions.

**Research site**

This research sought to learn from the experience of Kazakhstani HEIs with operating alumni associations. Unfortunately, there are not so many universities in Kazakhstan which could boast of successful alumni associations; therefore, it was vital to gather information about Kazakhstani HEIs' alumni associations upfront. Because Almaty has a major concentration of Kazakhstani higher education institutions, it was decided to look at the examples of Almaty HEIs. It was found that there are some private, joint-stock, and national universities whose cases are worth to be investigated. Several reasons identified the choice of these site universities: 1) these universities have established alumni associations which are currently operating; 2) these universities receive both material and non-material support from alumni; 3) these site universities have alumni funds, and 4) these site universities are actively promoting their alumni associations in public. Moreover, in one of the site universities, an alumni association was set by alumni themselves which also provoked my research interest. However, as the study aims to look at the example of a state university in Kazakhstani periphery as well, one state university with established alumni association was chosen. Overall, six universities were selected as site universities for the present research among which are: three joint-stock companies, one private, one national, and one state university.

**Instruments and materials**

The survey was used to collect quantitative data. The tool was validated by expert review in the face of my supervisor. The findings of the previous studies were used to create survey questions. This is how the validity of the instrument was ensured. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach alpha procedures were applied. The survey was divided into three sections: participants' background information (gender, age, university, major, socio-economic status, etc.), academic and social experience (the quality of the education,

involvement in social events, involvement in extracurricular activities, academic performance, relationship with faculty staff, etc.), role identity questions. Five-point Likert-style scales were used for all scaling questions.

The last section of the survey was used to identify a senior student's role identity as a university's alumnus (a). For this reason, role identity scales developed by McDearmon (2012) were adopted in the present survey. The first role identity scale is called 'alumni role identity salience' which consists of five items:

- Being an alumnus (a) is something I often think about (Salience1).
- I really don't have any clear feelings about being an alumnus (a) (Salience2)
- For me, being an alumnus (a) means more than just contributing money or time (Salience3).
- Being an alumnus (a) is an important part of who I am (Salience4).
- I would feel lost if I were not an alumnus (a) (Salience5).

Another role identity scale assesses alumni role expectations and consists of another five items:

- As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through financial contributions (donations or gifts) (Role1).
- As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through volunteering (Role2).
- As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend alumni events (on- and off-campus) (Role3).
- As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to serve on a university board or committee (Role4).
- As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend athletic events (Role5).

Thus, the survey instrument was created firstly to learn students' background information (independent variables), then to learn about students' social and academic experience (independent variables) at their universities, and in the last section, to determine students' role identities as universities' alumni (dependent variables) based on students' background and university experience. Due to the fact that not all of the research participants are fluent in English, the survey was conducted both in English and Russian languages.

Thirteen individual and two focus group interviews were employed in this study as qualitative data collection instruments. Interviews serve to be an excellent tool for learning the opinions and ideas of the participants. Physical presence allows not only to presuppose an interviewee to talk openly but also to make observations, which can be later filled in the researcher's notes. One-on-one interviews allow seeing the attitudes of people towards this or that issue through body language which cannot be controlled by people. The present study used two types of in-depth qualitative interviews: individual semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. As stated by Hitchcock and Hughes semi-structured interviews are more flexible version of the structured interview which allows the researcher to probe and expand the interviewee's response thus allowing to achieve in-depth views of the participants (1993). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to be flexible in terms of asking the interview question not according to their order in the list of questions, but according to the answers I got from the participants. This ensured a continuous flow of interviewees' thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

Likewise, I conducted two focus group discussions. Usually, the aim of a focus group discussions is to "gain a broad range of views on the research topic (...) and to create an environment where participants feel comfortable to express their views" (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, as cited in Hennink, 2013, p.1). Paying attention to this opinion, I tried to create a

comfortable atmosphere to ensure vigorous interaction among interviewees by inviting a smaller number of people who know each other for an extended period. Thus, three participants, employees of one department, were interviewed in each focus group. I acted more as a moderator of these group discussions allowing interviewees to talk openly and provide reasoning for the views they hold.

The questions were divided into three main parts: ice-breakers, back-ground questions, grand tour questions. To ensure high quality of the interview questions, they were discussed with my supervisor. Due to the fact that interviewees' language of interaction varied greatly from university to university, interviews were conducted in three languages (English, Russian, and Kazakh) depending on interviewees' preferences.

### **Procedures**

Having received ethics approval, I started the process of data collection. The first steps in the data collection were associated with communicating the site universities in Almaty. I requested official letters addressed to the rectors of the site universities in order to provide a legal base for my interest in these universities. In the initial stage, university administration representatives were called to be informed about the study and asked to participate. Then official letters signed by the dean of the GSE were sent via e-mails to representatives of university administration. The same letters contained the information about the purpose of the study, its importance and possible benefits for the universities and future studies. Having received universities' permission and having negotiated the most convenient time for the research participants I started my research journey. I spent two weeks in Almaty collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time.

The interview participants were carefully selected from the number of universities' administration in accordance with the sampling criteria. Because they were already informed

about the study and agreed to participate I met with them in the designated time and place.

During the interviews the protocols were developed. Having handing out the consent forms I asked their permission to record our interviews. With participants' permission the dialogues were tape-recorded and notes were taken. Participants' personal information was coded and all the information was stored in my laptop secured by the password. Besides that, the majority of the interviewees provided additional data in terms of alumni magazines, leaflets, invitations, photos, and other artifacts. All these artifacts as well as interview records, and researcher's notes were then used for data analysis to ensure data integrity.

The survey was self-administered, web- and paper-based. For the online version of the survey I used Qualtrics software, access to which was provided by Nazarbayev University. Prior to gaining access to students I communicated university administration to present the purpose of the present study and introduce them with survey questions. Though each site university agreed to give interviews, not every HEI granted an access to senior class students.

Paper-based survey was held while the researcher was in the field collecting the data. To ensure high response rate I planned to survey senior students by distributing hard-copies of the questionnaire while I was in the field. However, the majority of senior students were out of the universities due to internship. As a result, 78 paper-based surveys were completed.

Then, I had to send an email invitation stating the purpose of the study and providing a link to the secure survey website to university administration to be further forwarded to senior students. The invitation was sent from the researcher's generated from a university domain email address in order to minimize the invitation being marked as spam. When the number of the survey participants did not reach necessary amount, several email reminders were sent to university administration which resulted in an additional surveys being completed. Then I decided to use another strategy to reach senior students population by signing in social



students' groups on various social media such as VK and Facebook. Being accepted as a member of these social groups I posted a message stating the research purpose and the benefits of my research to the system of higher education as well as contribution that students can make by completing the survey. In total 75 web-based surveys were completed. The overall number of completed surveys is 153.

### **Data analysis**

As mentioned above, this is a mixed methods study. Therefore, each design serves the purpose of addressing one of the questions. However, it is worth noting that these mixed methods complement each other to generate an overall data-driven understanding of alumni associations in Kazakhstani HEIs.

#### **The Quantitative part**

To determine students' alumni identity salience and alumni role expectations I have conducted quantitative analysis using SPSS software access to which was provided by Nazarbayev University. I have applied both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. However, prior to conducting any analysis Cronbach's alpha procedures were applied to ensure internal reliability of the survey items. Thus, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the experience scale (№ of items=10) was calculated to be  $\alpha=.71$ , while for alumni identity salience (№ of items=5) and alumni role expectation (№ of items=5) it was calculated to be  $\alpha=.84$  and  $\alpha=.89$  respectively. Having ensured the reliability of the survey instrument other statistical analyses were to follow.

In the initial stage the descriptive statistics was used to provide the investigator with the general picture of the participants' background. Similarly, descriptive statistics provided an

insight into senior students' academic and social experiences at their universities and the level of satisfaction with these experiences.

Inferential statistics was used in order to find out an association between students' background/experiences and alumni identity salience/alumni role expectations. The variables used in the study are ordinal (experience, identity, etc.), therefore it was necessary to use 'robust' statistical analysis to answer research questions and test the hypotheses. In this regard, ordinal logistic regression model, in particular, the polytomous universal model (PLUM) was utilized. Regression analysis is advantageous as it not only allows us to determine how well all our predictor variables together predict the outcome variable, but allows us to look at the relationship between each of our predictors separately and the outcome variable. PLUM in particular, "considers the probability of that event and all events that are ordered before it" (Muijs, 2011, p.165). In other words, this model is utilized to predict the probabilities of the different possible outcomes, given a set of predictors. The conducted analysis showed that the whole model of PLUM fits the data very well ( $N=153$ ,  $a^2=.606$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Following this procedures, allowed the researcher to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, the analysis' results will be presented in the findings section.

### **The Qualitative part**

To learn how alumni associations are organized and managed in the selected universities, it was necessary to conduct qualitative analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews ranged in length from eight to thirty five minutes. The interview records were transcribed and then the three step procedure: open coding, axial coding and thematic coding were applied for the analysis. Individual codes which were defined during open coding process highlighted single issues in the data, therefore it was necessary to organize the codes into groups based on similar attributes. These groups of codes were later

developed into themes. However, coding is not a straightforward exercise as asserted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison this process is continuous and requires constant comparison of the codes to ensure consistency of the data (2002). Having considered this opinion, I repeatedly looked through the data and the emerged codes to eliminate any kind of human error. This repetitive action helped to enlarge emerged themes with newly found individual codes. Having ensured the consistency of the emerged themes I then triangulated the data using researcher's notes, and involving the participants via email and phones for member-checking process. Following this procedures, allowed the researcher to answer the research questions posed in the qualitative part of the present study. The results will be presented in the following section.

### **Limitations**

The research question implies that the results of the study are highly theoretical in nature. My study attempts to predict the future of alumni associations in Kazakhstan, utilizing such intangible variables like 'salience' and 'identity', adopted from the previous research on university alumni by McDearmon (2012); while my study translates them onto senior students. To verify survey results it would be better to complement my quantitative part with qualitative interviews with students, but the time and cost issues could have arisen. Another limitation refers to the small sample size which implies that the sample is not as representative of the student population as possible.

As to qualitative part of the study, the interpretations of the qualitative data could be limited to the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the problem under investigation as well as personal experience. Together with it, it is difficult to verify the information provided by interviewees against the real-life experiences of Kazakhstani alumni associations.

**Summary**

This section presented the methods employed for the purpose of this study and provided rationales justifying their use. It also discussed the procedures undertaken to answer the research questions as well as limitations of the present study. Next chapter will present the study results.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### Introduction

The following chapter presents the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses. It also presents the findings in such a way that makes it easier for the reader to follow how research questions are answered and which data is used to answer which question. Therefore, I first report the results of the quantitative analyses to explain about university experiences of study participants. Then, I present which demographics and experience variables contribute to alumni identity salience and role expectations. In the qualitative part of findings I present the understandings of an alumni association by administration of the site universities. Last, the experiences of alumni associations are discussed.

### Quantitative part: What do students think?

The quantitative ‘strand’ of the present work aims to define students’ readiness to build life-long relationships with the university by determining students’ salience to becoming alumni as well as students’ alumni role expectations. Likewise, the researcher investigates what background and experience variables predict salience for students and the role expectations they hold of being alumni. Therefore, this section reveals the findings on students’ background, academic and social experience, followed by students’ alumnus (a) identity salience and alumni role expectations.

**Background of the research participants.** The conducted descriptive analysis (see Table 1) showed that the majority of the research participants are female students. Those aged 18-21 also constitute the greater part of the population. Among study participants 95.4% of the students report to having earned the first academic degree. In terms of financial assurance of the study, the major share is accounted for by parents and state grants. The majority of the respondents report having a high income and represent 36.6% (56) of the population. Students

with middle incomes and high-middle incomes follow this number by representing 21.6% and 25.5% of the population respectively. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis revealed that almost two thirds of the population is academically well-performing students with a GPA ranging from 3-3.5 to 3.5-4.

Table 1

*The Descriptive Statistics of the Research Population.*

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender		
Male	62	40.5
Female	91	59.5
Total	153	100
Age		
18-21	131	85.6
22-25	19	12.4
25 and more	3	2.0
Total	153	100
First academic degree		
Yes	146	95.4
No	7	4.6
Total	153	100
Source of funding for the study		
Myself	5	3.3
Parents	88	57.5
State grant	52	34.0
Rector's grant	2	1.3
Private organization	5	3.3
Total	152	99.3
Family monthly income		
50000-150000	20	13.1
150000-250000	33	21.6
250000-350000	39	25.5
350000 and more	56	36.6
Total	148	96.7
GPA for the last semester		
2.5-3	37	24.2
3-3.5	52	34.0
3.5-4	50	32.7
Total	139	90.8

Due to this group of descriptive findings it is possible to draw a good picture using the average scores as far as gender, GPA, self-financed or grant financed HE student, and/or income level of the family. Details will be presented in different analyses performed to make sense of data collected. To be a little more specific, both bivariate analysis and multivariate analyses are performed.

**Academic and social experience.** This group of findings presents the academic and social experience of the research participants, and the level of satisfaction with these experiences. The descriptive statistics for academic experience (see Table 2) showed that the majority of study participants are satisfied with the quality of academic programs and faculty's expertise. Thus those who are satisfied to some extent constitute the larger share of the student population; this share is then followed by those who are satisfied 23.5% and strongly satisfied 3.9%. Likewise, the analysis showed that the majority of the research population is satisfied with communication with the faculty. Then, I looked at the level of satisfaction with the services provided by university administration. Interestingly, the share of those who are satisfied and not satisfied with administrative services is equal at 26.8%, whereas, the majority of the participants are satisfied to some extent (45.8%). Likewise, I then looked at the level of satisfaction with communication with administrative staff. Similar to the previous findings the majority of the participants are satisfied to some extent (45.8%), whereas the share of those who are satisfied is slightly larger (27.4%) than the share of those dissatisfied (26.8%).

Table 2

*The Descriptive Statistics for Academic Experiences.*

	I am satisfied with my classes and how professors teach	I am satisfied with communication with my teachers	I am satisfied with the service provided by university administration	I am satisfied with communication with university administration
Scale of the response/Frequencies				

Strongly disagree	8	5	19	16
Disagree	16	11	22	25
Agree to some extent	87	67	70	70
Agree	36	58	36	34
Strongly agree	6	12	5	8
Total	153	153	152	153

Another group of findings was derived based on the survey variables which emerged from the literature review. As asserted by Gallo, involvement in sport, social, cultural and other activities is rather important, as the experience gained can influence involvement in after-graduation activities (2013). Therefore, I looked at whether the research participants are involved in extra-curricular activities (see Table 3). It was found that the majority of them 68.7% are not involved in sports activities at all. Similar to previous findings, the greater part of the research participants is not engaged in art clubs (84.9%). In terms of engagement in any other social activities, the major share of the participants accounts for non-participation (54.9%). I was also curious about students' involvement in university student councils. Having conducted the analysis, I found that 85% of the study participants do not hold membership in student councils. However, though the research participants are majorly reluctant to be engaged in sports, art, or social activities, they are mostly satisfied with extracurricular activities and services provided by universities. Thus, 31.4% of the respondents report being satisfied with extracurricular activities, while 48.4% are satisfied to some extent. Likewise, the respondents report to be mostly satisfied with peer-to-peer interactions. Perhaps, study participants appreciate the opportunities provided by universities for extracurricular activities, but still are either reluctant to be involved in these activities or there could be other hidden pitfalls which hinder them from being engaged in these activities. These pitfalls, though interesting to the investigator, are the subject of different kind of research.



Table 3

*The Descriptive Statistics for Social Experience.*

Scale of the response/ Frequencies	I am engaged in university's sports clubs	I am engaged in university's art clubs	I am engaged in university's social events	I am a member of the university's student council	I am satisfied with the extracurricular activities and services provided by the university	I am satisfied with communication with my peers
Strongly disagree	42	55	30	58	12	5
Disagree	63	75	54	72	15	3
Agree to some extent	19	13	35	6	74	28
Agree	20	4	24	9	43	72
Strongly agree	9	5	7	5	5	45
Total	153	152	150	150	149	153

Having learned about students' experiences, I then sought to determine students' awareness about alumni associations and their attitude towards them. Thus, it was found that the majority of the research participants (60.1%) have never heard about alumni associations though such associations exist at their universities. In terms of attitude towards alumni associations, the largest share (68%) of study participants was indifferent towards alumni associations.

**Bivariate analysis.**

Based on the results of the descriptive statistics I then looked at the relationships between the variables. Due to the ordinal category of the variables employed in the present research I have conducted Spearman's rho correlation analysis (see Table 4). The correlation analysis showed that there is a statistically significant positive moderate relationship ( $r=.577$ ,  $p = .00$ ) between satisfaction with communication with faculty and satisfaction with academic quality. In other words, the more students are satisfied with communication with the faculty the more they are satisfied with the quality of academic programs. I also became curious as to

whether there is a relationship between the level of satisfaction with communication with administrative staff and the level of satisfaction with administrative services. The correlation analysis showed that there is a strong positive relationship ( $r=.821$ ,  $p = .00$ ) between these variables. In other words, the more students are satisfied with communication with administrative staff, the more they are satisfied with administrative services.

To understand whether there was a relationship between participants' knowledge about alumni associations and participants' attitudes towards them, the correlation analysis was conducted. The correlation analysis showed that there is a statistically significant positive moderate relationship ( $r=.37$ ,  $p = .00$ ) between participants' knowledge about alumni associations and participants' attitudes towards them.

Table 4

*Correlation Coefficient Values (Spearman's rho) between the Variables.*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Satisfaction with academic quality	1					
2. Satisfaction with communication with faculty	.577**	1				
3. Satisfaction with administrative services			1			
4. Satisfaction with communication with administration			.812**	1		
5. Awareness about alumni associations					1	
6. Attitude towards alumni association					.371**	1

\*\* $p < .01$

These descriptive and bivariate analyses were performed to answer the following research sub-question: What are the university experiences of senior students?

Thus, the conducted analyses assisted with making the suggestion that the research participants are mostly satisfied with the quality of their academic programs, faculty and administrative services as well as they are positive about communication with faculty,

administrative staff, and peers. Moreover, they are satisfied with extracurricular services provided by universities; however, this population of students is rather flaccid in terms of engagement in sport, social, cultural and other activities.

Though the researcher learned about the university experiences of senior students, it is still hard to convey whether these flaccid students, though satisfied with their universities, would build life-long relationships with their alma mater. The answer to this question is thought to be answered in the next section of the quantitative analyses findings.

**Alumni identity salience: Multivariate analyses**

McDearmon’s role identity scales were adopted to identify a senior student’s role identity as a university alumnus (a) (2012). In his study he examined how support behaviours (donations, volunteering, participation in events, and others) are influenced by institutional expectations, social expectations and alumni role identity. However, he did not investigate whether there is a relationship between students’ experiences and alumni identity salience/alumni role expectations. While present study aims to understand which alumni identities are being held by the research participants (see Table 5), it also seeks to find out which demographic and undergraduate experiences contribute to alumni identity salience/alumni role expectations.

Table 5

*The Descriptive Statistics for the Salience Scale.*

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	Being an alumnus(a) is something I often think about	I really don't have any clear feelings about being an alumnus(a)	For me, being an alumnus(a) means more than just contributing money or time	Being an alumnus(a) is an important part of who I am	I would feel lost if I were not an alumnus(a)
Scale of the response/ Frequencies					

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Strongly disagree	20	7	17	22	36
Disagree	48	33	48	68	79
Agree to some extent	63	52	66	47	25
Agree	15	41	11	7	4
Strongly agree	2	14	4	2	3
Total	148	147	146	146	147

The descriptive analysis of the responses for the salience scale indicates that the overall sample disagrees that the role of alumnus (a) fit into their sense of self. It can be interpreted that the majority of the student population being studied is not salient towards being alumni. However, it is still interesting to know which factors could contribute to the development of alumnus (a) identity at students. For this reason, polytomous universal model (PLUM) analysis has been conducted. The results of the PLUM analysis for the salience scale are as follows:

Salience 1. Being an alumnus (a) is something I often think about.

The results of the regression analysis revealed five predictors of the salience 1 (see Table 6). These predictors include age, financial assurance of the study, family income, satisfaction with communication with peers and attitude towards alumni associations. These results suggest that students from middle to high-middle income families are more likely to be salient towards thinking about being alumni. Likewise, those who reported paying tuition fees by themselves, as well as those whose parents pay for the study, and holders of state grants are also more likely to think about being alumni as well as those who are not satisfied with communication with peers. However, surprisingly those who are satisfied with peer-to-peer interaction students are less likely to think about being alumni as well as those who felt indifferent towards alumni associations. Together with it, the younger students, aged 18-21, are less likely to think about being alumni than those 25 years old.

Table 6

*PLUM Results for Salience 1.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Age=1	-4.9	.032
Financial support=1	5.9	.009
Financial support=2	3.9	.03
Financial support=3	6.3	.002
Family income=2	2.0	.004
Family income=3	2.1	.003
Satisfaction with communication with peers=2	8.4	.004
Satisfaction with communication with peers=4	-2.5	.00
Attitude towards alumni association=2	-13.9	.049

Salience 2. I really don't have any clear feelings about being an alumnus (a).

The regression analysis (see Table 7) identified four predictors of salience 2. Thus it was found that underperforming students and students familiar with alumni associations are likely to have no clear feelings about being alumni, whereas students whose relatives or friends have been engaged in charity associated activities, as well as those who are partially satisfied with communication with peers, are less likely to be confused of whether or not to be alumnus (a).

Table 7

*PLUM Results for Salience 2.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Charity=1	-1.6	.01
GPA=1	1.3	.03
Satisfaction with communication with peers=3	-1.6	.03
Familiarity with alumni associations=1	1.3	.01

Salience 3. For me, being an alumnus (a) means more than just contributing money or time.

The regression analysis determined eight independent variables which predict salience 3 (see Table 8). Thus it was found that male students and students from middle income families are more likely to think that being alumnus(a) means more than just contributing time or

money. Similarly, students who are dissatisfied and partially satisfied with communication with administration are more likely to agree that salience 3 fits into their sense of selves. Regarding, engagement in sport activities, both engaged and not engaged in sport students all take on salience 3, whereas students who are not engaged in social activities are less likely to accept salience 3 as a part of their sense of self. In contrast to salience 1, students who are paying for the study themselves as well as holders of rector's grants are less likely to think that being alumnus(a) means more than just contributing time or money. Members of student councils are also more likely to accept salience 3. Satisfied with peer-to-peer interactions students are less likely to take on salience 3, whereas dissatisfied with communication with peers students are more likely to take on salience 3.

Table 8

*PLUM Results for Salience 3.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Gender=1	1.6	.011
Financial support=1	-4.6	.039
Financial support=4	-10.1	.032
Family income=2	2.5	.00
Satisfaction with communication with administration=2	5.9	.005
Satisfaction with communication with administration=3	4.0	.034
Engagement in sports activities=1	4.1	.007
Engagement in sports activities=2	3.4	.009
Engagement in sports activities=3	3.0	.028
Engagement in sports activities=4	2.6	.055
Engagement in social activities=1	-4.0	.017
Engagement in social activities=2	-3.1	.040
Membership in student council=4	4.0	.038
Satisfaction with communication with peers=2	7.9	.010
Satisfaction with communication with peers=4	-1.5	.016

Salience 4. Being an alumnus (a) is an important part of who I am.

The regression analysis revealed ten predictors of salience 4 (see Table 9). Consistent with previous findings, males from middle to high-middle income families are more likely to

accept alumni identity as a part of their sense of self. Moreover, similar to salience 3 those who are holders of a rector's grant or who are paying for education themselves are less likely to take on salience 4. Surprisingly, underperforming study participants who were not satisfied with communication with faculty all are more likely to accept salience 4 as a part of their identity. However, students who are not satisfied with academic quality are less likely to take on salience 4 than those satisfied. Together with this, both engaged and not engaged in sports activities students take on salience 4. Those, who agreed to be involved in social activities to some extent, also accept that being alumni is an important part of their sense of self. Similar to previous findings, students who are not satisfied with peer-to-peer interactions are more likely to accept salience 4, while students who are satisfied with communication with peers are less likely to take on salience 4.

Table 9

*PLUM Results for Salience 4.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Gender=1	1.6	.007
Financial support=1	-5.3	.018
Financial support=4	-13.2	.002
Family income=2	3.3	.00
Family income=3	2.4	.001
GPA=1	1.7	.008
Satisfaction with the quality of academic programmes=1	-5.4	.032
Satisfaction with the quality of academic programmes=2	-5.7	.014
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=1	3.8	.05
Satisfaction with communication with administration=2	4.2	.034
Engagement in sports activities=1	3.9	.01
Engagement in sports activities=2	3.9	.004
Engagement in sports activities=3	3.9	.006
Engagement in sports activities=4	3.5	.015
Engagement in social activities=3	3.0	.030
Satisfaction with communication with peers=2	7.5	.008
Satisfaction with communication with peers=4	-2.5	.00

Saliency 5. I would feel lost if I were not an alumnus (a).

The regression analysis identified eight predictors of saliency 5 (see Table 5), which suggest that males from middle to high-middle income families, are more likely to feel lost if not become alumni than females from high-income families. Similar to saliency 4, those who are paying for the study themselves are less likely to take on saliency 5 than those whose study is paid by companies. Consistent with previous findings those who are satisfied with communication with peers are less likely to take on saliency 5, while dissatisfied students are more likely to be salient to feel lost if not be alumni. Interestingly, both those who are satisfied and dissatisfied with academic quality are also less likely to feel lost if not be alumni. Satisfaction with communication with faculty is predicted to influence students' readiness to take on saliency 5 as those who are dissatisfied with communication with faculty are more likely to feel lost if not be alumni than those satisfied with faculty-students interactions. Together with this, students who reported to be engaged in sport activities to some extent or not engaged at all are likely to take on saliency 5. In addition, students who are positively presupposed towards alumni associations are less likely to be salient to feel lost if not be alumni rather than those negatively presupposed.

Table 10

*PLUM Results for Saliency 5.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Gender=1	2.0	.003
Financial support=1	-6.4	.018
Family income=2	1.6	.037
Family income=3	1.5	.042
Satisfaction with the quality of academic programmes=1	-7.7	.011
Satisfaction with the quality of academic programmes=2	-5.3	.038
Satisfaction with the quality of academic programmes=4	-5.6	.019
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=1	6.0	.01
Engagement in sports activities=2	2.8	.047
Engagement in sports activities=3	3.1	.038
Satisfaction with communication with peers=2	6.6	.029



Satisfaction with communication with peers=4	-1.9	.005
Attitude towards alumni associations=1	-41.0	.00

Despite the results of the descriptive statistics, regression analysis identified factors which could contribute to the development of alumnus (a) identity at students. Thus, gender and family income were identified as the most consistent factors which influence alumni identity salience. In particular, in four out of five cases, students from middle to high-middle income families are likely to agree that alumni identity fits into their sense of self. In three out of five cases gender also determines students' salience towards being alumnus (a). In particular, male students are more likely to accept alumni identity as a part of their sense of self than female students. Together with this, students who are engaged in social activities and members of student councils are also likely to accept alumni identity as a part of their sense of selves. The analysis for 'satisfaction with communication with peers' variable presents interesting results, as in four out of five cases, dissatisfied with communication with peers students are more likely to accept alumni identity rather than those students who are satisfied with peer-to-peer interaction. 'Engagement in sport activities' and 'financial assurance of the study' are dubious predictors of alumni identity salience as both engaged and not engaged in sport students are likely to take on alumni saliencies as well as students whose study is paid by themselves, their parents, or holders of grants. The rest of the predictors though were not as consistent as aforementioned factors still influence alumni identity salience. These predictors include: positive and neutral attitude towards alumni associations, satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the quality of academic programs, communication with faculty and administrative staff, and GPA. These findings assist in answering the following research question: Which demographics and experience variables contribute to alumni identity salience?

Thus, research findings suggest that gender and socio-economic status are two demographic variables which contribute to alumni identity salience. In particular, male students and students from families with middle to high-middle income are more likely to be salient towards being alumni. In regards to undergraduate experience, which is composed of academic (satisfaction with academic quality, faculty, administration, GPA) and social experiences (engagement in extracurricular activities, peer-to-peer interaction), mixed results were found. The most consistent though refer to social experience. In particular, involvement in social activities can predict alumni identity salience. Moreover, one of the unexpected findings refers to satisfaction with communication with peers. Thus, it was revealed that students who are not satisfied with peer-to-peer interactions are more likely to be salient towards being alumni than those strongly satisfied.

### **Alumni role expectations**

Alumni role expectation scale was developed by McDearmon (2012) in order to determine how individuals perceive their roles as alumni. According to expectancy theory (Weerts & Ronca, 2007), role expectations influence actual behavior of the alumni. In other words, if a student, in this study, accepts particular role, it is highly likely that this student will perform this kind of behavior after graduation when given such opportunities. Therefore, it firstly vital to know which alumni roles the research participants are likely to take on (see Table 11), and then which independent variables can predict students' alumni role expectations.

Table 11

*The Descriptive Statistics for the Role Scale.*

Scale of the response/ Frequencies	As an alumnus(a), it is my duty to support the university through financial contributions	As an alumnus(a), it is my duty to support the university through volunteering	As an alumnus(a), I am expected to attend alumni events	As an alumnus(a), it is my duty to serve on a university's board or committee	As an alumnus(a), I am expected to attend athletic events
Strongly disagree	13	9	11	8	11
Disagree	57	33	26	39	47
Agree to some extent	61	62	62	69	65
Agree	7	36	42	22	18
Strongly agree	6	5	5	7	4
Total	144	144	146	145	145

The descriptive statistics of the role scale revealed that the majority of the research participants agree to take on all of the alumni roles to some extent. Whereas the significant part of the respondents disagree to support alma mater through financial contributions and to serve on a university board or committee, another part agrees to volunteer for university and attend alumni events. To explore which factors could contribute to students' alumni role expectations the polytomous universal model (PLUM) analysis has been conducted. The results of the PLUM analysis are as follows:

Role 1. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through financial contributions (donations or gifts).

The regression analysis determined seven predictors of role 1 (see Table 12).

Particularly, it was found that male students, both underperforming and performing well academically, are predicted to be more alluding towards providing financial support to university. Interesting finding states that both satisfied and dissatisfied with communication

with administrative staff students are also likely to take on role 1. Those who are engaged and not engaged in sport activities were also predicted to be salient towards making financial contributions to university. Together with this, students who were not satisfied with peer-to-peer interaction also predicted to take on role 1. However, students who are not satisfied with extracurricular activities are less likely to take on role 1, as well as those who are satisfied and not satisfied with communication with faculty.

Table 12

*PLUM Results for Role 1.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Gender=1	1.2	.027
GPA=1	1.6	.012
GPA=2	1.2	.021
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=2	-4.0	.016
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=4	-2.3	.038
Satisfaction with communication with administration=1	6.3	.004
Satisfaction with communication with administration=2	6.9	.001
Satisfaction with communication with administration=3	7.1	.00
Satisfaction with communication with administration=4	3.8	.009
Engagement in sports activities=1	3.6	.013
Engagement in sports activities=2	2.9	.024
Engagement in sports activities=4	3.3	.015
Satisfaction with extracurricular activities=2	-3.4	.041
Satisfaction with communication with peers=2	6.9	.013

Role 2. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through volunteering.

The regression analysis identified seven predictors of role 2 (see Table 13). Thus students from middle to high-middle income families were predicted to be more alluding towards providing volunteering work to university. Together with this, underperforming students (GPA<3), and students with positive attitude towards alumni associations are also likely to take on role 2. The regression analysis also revealed two dubious predictors of role 2: engagement in sport and art activities. These predictors are dubious because both engaged and not engaged in sport and art activities students are likely to support alma mater through

volunteering. Interestingly, students who reported to be strongly dissatisfied with communication with faculty are more likely to take on role 2 rather than those strongly satisfied. Likewise, students who are not engaged in social activities are less likely to volunteer for university rather than those socially active students.

Table 13

*PLUM Results for Role 2.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Family income=2	2.0	.008
Family income=3	1.7	.023
GPA=1	1.3	.045
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=1	5.1	.014
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=2	-4.3	.019
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=3	-3.1	.029
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=4	-3.2	.014
Engagement in sports activities=1	5.2	.001
Engagement in sports activities=2	4.4	.001
Engagement in sports activities=3	2.8	.038
Engagement in sports activities=4	5.6	.00
Engagement in arts=1	8.9	.00
Engagement in arts=2	8.7	.00
Engagement in arts=3	8.5	.001
Engagement in arts=4	10.5	.001
Engagement in social activities=1	-3.3	.037
Attitude towards alumni=1	1.9	.003

Role 3. As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend alumni events (on- and off-campus).

The regression analysis revealed six predictors of role 3 (see Table 14). Similar to previous findings, positive attitude towards alumni associations was found to be significant predictor of role 3. It was also found that those whose relatives or friends are engaged in charity associated activities are likely to attend alumni events by taking on role 3. Moreover, students who were not satisfied with communication with faculty are also likely to take on role 3. However, students who reported to be dissatisfied with administrative services were

predicted to be less alluding towards visiting alumni events. In terms of engagement in sport and art clubs, not engaged in sport activities students were predicted to take on role 3, as well as those who are engaged and not engaged in arts.

Table 14

*PLUM Results for Role 3.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Charity=1	1.3	.033
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=1	4.7	.018
Satisfaction with administrative services=2	-3.8	.048
Engagement in sports activities=1	3.1	.031
Engagement in sports activities=2	2.7	.028
Engagement in arts=1	5.4	.025
Engagement in arts=2	4.9	.035
Engagement in arts=3	5.9	.015
Engagement in arts=4	6.0	.037
Attitude towards alumni=1	6.4	.00

Role 4. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to serve on a university board or committee.

The regression analysis determined nine predictors (see Table 15) of role 4. Thus it was found that males have greater identity towards role 4, as well as respondents whose relatives or friends are engaged in charity associated activity. Together with this, those who reported to be satisfied with administrative services are also likely to serve on a university board or committee. However, those who reported to be dissatisfied with communication with administration are also likely to take on role 4 as well as those who reported to be strongly dissatisfied with communication with faculty. The participants who are not satisfied with academic quality are less likely to take on role 4 than those strongly satisfied. These findings suggest that students who are satisfied with academic quality and administrative services are likely to serve on a university board or committee, as well as those dissatisfied with communication with faculty and staff. 'Engagement in sport' was again found to be dubious predictor of role 4. It was also found that students who are dissatisfied with extra-curricular

activities and those satisfied with communication with peers are less likely to take on role 4 than those strongly satisfied with extracurricular activities and dissatisfied with communication with peers.

Table 15

*PLUM Results for Role 4.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Gender=1	1.5	.010
Charity=1	1.9	.004
Satisfaction with academic quality=1	-4.9	.055
Satisfaction with communication with faculty=1	4.4	.023
Satisfaction with the service provided by administration=3	4.6	.022
Satisfaction with the service provided by administration=4	7.1	.00
Satisfaction with communication with administration=1	7.6	.001
Satisfaction with communication with administration=2	4.5	.022
Engagement in sport activities=1	4.9	.002
Engagement in sport activities=2	4.1	.003
Engagement in sport activities=3	2.8	.049
Engagement in sport activities=4	3.2	.025
Satisfaction with extracurricular activities=1	-4.4	.008
Satisfaction with communication with peers=4	-1.4	.021

Role 5. As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend athletic events.

The regression analysis unveiled six predictors of role 5 (see Table 16). Consistent with other findings, high-middle family income as well as positive attitude towards alumni associations was found to be significant predictors of role 5. Engagement in sport was again found to be dubious predictor of role 5. Students who reported to be dissatisfied with communication with administration are more likely to attend athletic events rather than strongly satisfied students. Together with this, both engaged and not engaged in social events have greater identity towards role 5. Still those students who reported to be strongly dissatisfied with extracurricular activities are less likely to attend athletic events after graduation.

Table 16

*PLUM Results for Role 5.*

Factors/independent variables	Estimates	Sig.
Family income=3	2.1	.005
Satisfaction with communication with administration=1	5.6	.010
Satisfaction with communication with administration=2	4.4	.022
Satisfaction with communication with administration=3	3.5	.048
Engagement in sports activities=1	5.0	.001
Engagement in sports activities=2	3.6	.006
Engagement in sports activities=3	3.9	.005
Engagement in sports activities=4	3.4	.016
Engagement in social activities=2	-4.4	.003
Engagement in social activities=3	-2.5	.054
Engagement in social activities=4	-3.1	.025
Satisfaction with extracurricular activities=1	-3.4	.040
Attitude towards alumni associations=1	14.2	.00

The most consistent predictors to different roles were found to be middle and high-middle income, and positive attitude towards alumni associations. It was also regularly found that students who are not satisfied with extracurricular activities (three out of five cases), are less likely to take on alumni roles. Similar to findings for alumnus(a) identity salience, gender as well as GPA were found to be predictors for alumnus(a) role expectations. Thus male students, and students whose GPA does not exceed the threshold of 3.5, are more likely to take on alumni roles presented in the role scale. Together with this, students who reported to be dissatisfied with communications with peers are more likely to take on various alumni roles than those satisfied with peer-to-peer interactions (roles 1 and 4). The rest of the predictors though were as consistent as aforementioned ones are difficult to interpret as both satisfied and dissatisfied with communication with faculty and communication with staff are likely to take on some of the alumni roles as well as those engaged and not engaged in extracurricular activities.



Having conducted both descriptive and inferential analyses with the quantitative data, it is possible to draw two major conclusions: first, the majority of the respondents disagree that alumnus (a) identity fits into their sense of self as well as they disagree to take on alumni roles. Second, the research participants are negative, but still their negativity predicts that they want to be either members of alumni associations, or volunteer for alma mater and visit alumni events. These findings suggest that people who are not satisfied with how things are have an understanding of how things should be, and therefore, they want to volunteer to fix things according to their understanding. These findings assist in answering the following research question: What is the probability that university undergraduates would build relationship with the university after graduation?

While the descriptive analysis revealed that the research participants do not hold alumni identities and are majorly reluctant to take on alumni roles, the inferential analysis found that there is a probability that male students and students from middle and high-middle income families with positive outlook on alumni associations are likely to build relationship with alma mater after graduation. Likewise, students who are engaged in social activities of the university and students dissatisfied with communication with peers are all likely to support alma mater after graduation.

### **Qualitative part: What do university officials think?**

The qualitative ‘strand’ of the present work aims to learn the opinions of university representatives about alumni associations while investigating how alumni associations are organized and managed in the selected universities. The qualitative analysis of individual and focus group interviews revealed several themes which are presented in accordance with the aims of the present research. Therefore, I first provide background information on alumni associations of the site universities. Then I present the ‘understandings’ of alumni associations

by research participants. Next, I describe which material and non-material support is provided by alumni of the selected universities, followed by an emerged ‘alumni loyalty’ theme which contributes to the understanding of alumni support. Last, I assess the selected alumni associations against criteria which emerged as consistent codes during the data analysis.

### **The present situation of alumni associations**

Six universities were selected as research sites for the present study. The research interest in these universities is underpinned by several reasons: first, I intended to look at HEIs of different types, and then at HEIs with different organizational-legal forms. Following this, three joint-stock, one private, one national and one state university were selected. The site universities were assigned the letters in the alphabetical order to avoid ethical issues, which are as follows: universities A, B, C, D, E, and F.

As was presumed the development stage of alumni associations in these universities vary greatly, and partially due to the type and the legal form of a particular university. These and other factors influencing the development of alumni associations are stated in the response by Ms D, representative of D university administration “The development of alumni associations vary depending on different forms of ownership, different approaches to management, and the varying extent of bureaucratization of this or that university”. Together with this, other factors influencing the development of alumni associations in Kazakhstan were mentioned. Thus, the majority of the respondents compared Kazakhstani alumni associations to those in the US by fairly stating that the alumni tradition has been built in the US for centuries, while in Kazakhstan it is a newly-formed practice. The others continued claiming Soviet legacy and local mentality. For instance, Ms B, an administrative representative of university A, responses:

In our old Soviet understanding, alumni association means getting together once a year or once in a decade in meetings [toi], where alumni meet and in a best-case scenario make a gift, excursion to alma mater, and that is it. Whilst in the West it is a daily work, it is a continuous communication with each alumnus (a), and we work toward this.

Another participant, Ms A, an administrative representative of the same university, continues “charity is not developed in Kazakhstan, as you know Kazakhstan as independent state is only twenty-five years old, and secondly, in Kazakh families there are many relatives whom you should support”.

The participants’ responses suggest that there are difficulties associated with the development of alumni associations in Kazakhstan due to the novelty of the phenomenon for Kazakhstani HEIs, Soviet legacy and local mentality. However, consciousness of the existing problems motivates universities to take steps toward popularization of the alumni culture in Kazakhstan.

Having started from participants’ beliefs of alumni associations and attitudes toward them, I then proceeded by asking participants for their understanding of an alumni association. The majority of the respondents started recalling alumni support such as financial aid to students, employment opportunities to fresh graduates, internship places, sponsorship, networking, and the creation of an endowment fund. At the same time, there are respondents who stressed alumni loyalty as a first-shot association with alumni networks. Thus, Ms C, administration representative of university B, responds: “an alumni association it is a network of loyal and committed to university alumni who participate in university life in terms of internship places, employment, sponsorship, and scholarships to students”. Ms D, another interviewee, would concur with this opinion by saying that “alumni association is an association of people who are connected through common student past, loyalty to one

particular place in face of alma mater, with which they associate, not only warm memories regarding their youth, but also a start in life". Following different understandings of an alumni association, it is possible to suggest that for the majority of the respondents alumni association and alumni support are closely connected with one another, whilst some stress alumni loyalty as an important condition for the existence of alumni associations in the beginning. These important themes which emerged during the data analysis will be discussed further, while I proceed with the structure, management, and activities of alumni associations in the selected universities.

The establishment of alumni associations of the selected universities dates back to the period from 2001 to 2017. As a result, some alumni associations are more developed than others. When inquiring about alumni associations in the selected universities, I was curious about the factors which pushed site universities to come up with the idea of alumni associations in the beginning. Based on interviewees' responses a few powerful factors were identified. The most influential factors involve a top-down initiative of the university's top-management and initiative of alumni themselves. Some participants also mentioned participation in rankings and recommendations of the attestation committee as factors which may also have contributed to the establishment of alumni associations in their universities.

After I identified the factors which contributed to the development of the selected alumni associations, I then inquired about the structure and management of these associations. It was found that some alumni associations are part of the university structure, while others stand as separate legal entities. Interestingly, one of the alumni associations that was formed recently by alumni themselves, and which stands as a separate legal entity, is thriving to become a part of the university structure to gain political and administrative feasibility from

the university. Thus, the representative of E university's alumni association, Mr F, explains the reasons:

I am only who dealing with it, it is very hard for me to compose with my work or this fund that's why I would like to have a very good team that will be based at university and having the resources of the university, they are having e-mails and contacts, this would be easier for them to spread the information among the graduates, to write to all them to support similar funds, or foundations, or alumni club.

Oposing this opinion, another representative of a different alumni association of university C, which is also a separate legal entity, Mr P, explains the benefits of this legal status:

You see when two structures are independent and separate in legal framework it is also considered to be correct, because they have separate statutes, regulations, appointments, organizational structure and power. In this regard, being a part of university's structure will limit its (alumni association) connections, they will be under university's administration. However, when they are independent, they have more freedom. Besides, association is a public association with board as a supreme authority which makes decision. There is a board of directors, of founders which determines the strategy and the course of development.

There is a kernel of truth in Mr P's words; however, this alumni association works in close cooperation with the university, is situated in one of the university buildings and uses university resources to maintain the operational work of the alumni association. These responses suggest that the successful activity of an alumni association as a separate legal entity is possible on condition if there is close cooperation between the university and the alumni

association, and if the university provides all the necessary resources to alumni associations including infrastructure, alumni contacts, communication channels and human resources.

There are also cases, when there are several alumni associations within one university. Thus, it was revealed that in two out of six universities there is more than one alumni association: one university-wide and a few school-wide associations. The reason for this is that there is no unified alumni database and each school has its own alumni database and own alumni projects and meetings. The other reason lies in the fact that a particular school's alumni set up an alumni association themselves, and with the passing years a university-wide alumni association was established. It is noteworthy that alumni interests also vary from school to school which may also contribute to the development of several alumni associations within one university. For instance, MBA alumni of university B created an alumni association as a platform for professional networking which is an important component of their activity, and the activity of this alumni association differs from that of the university's.

Together with this, there are cases in which an alumni association is performing within the structure of one department. Thus, the successful example of university A shows that one department which manages several interrelated directions including alumni affairs, career center, fundraising and external relationships could become the best solution when deciding on the organizational aspect of an alumni association. Despite the limited number of people, six employees in a department, the department manages to perform several tasks simultaneously due to coordinated work in all directions achieved through constant staff meetings and the intrinsic motivation of employees. Ms B, the director of the department says "We try to constantly exchange the information on different requests, letters, invitations, events, i.e. we know what each other of us is doing to coordinate our activities to the betterment of our university". Then she continues "in our department there are the most loyal,

committed to work employees who do their best to develop (...), and if we receive an invitation, project we jump at this project and lead it from the beginning till the end, though sometimes it is not in our duties”. A good team of employees as a factor contributing to the successful activity of an alumni association was also emphasized by other respondents. For instance, Mr F from university E, believes that “a very good team that will be based at university” will positively affect the development of their alumni association, while Mr B from university C, asserts:

Sound management and control of the process, because alumni is a continuous process, year after year their number is increasing, and if this process is skillfully controlled and managed you may get a lot of positive outputs from the activity of alumni association both for university and an association itself.

These responses suggest that strong teams of committed employees together with sound management are factors which contribute to the successful performance of an alumni association. Though I agree with this opinion, there are milestones which determine the success of an alumni association, derived from the literature review. These are an alumni database and comprehensive alumni communication strategies. Without an alumni database and sound communication strategies it would not be possible to reach and involve the main resources of alumni associations – alumni themselves.

The development of a database is a time- and resource-consuming process which requires tremendous effort. As a result, the forming of an alumni database became an issue for university D, where an alumni association has been recently established. Thus, Ms D shares the experience of creating alumni database from scratch:

We started with finding the records of alumni who graduated the university in different years. (...) It appeared that we have 51 classes of graduates of different years and to find

all of them is a goal, for a rational person, unattainable due to different reasons both objective and subjective: someone passed away, someone was not added to the records, and unfortunately the database is not complete. And we started with digitization of the records, i.e. transfer of the information from handwritten registration books to computer media. From this problem stemmed another problem – lack of human resources, lack of opportunities.

For university D the formation of the database became an issue due to time-related factors and lack of human resources. To deal with similar problems, other universities, for instance universities C and F, which also have a long history of existence, assigned each school to develop its own database formed on the basis of group passports. As a result, each school has its own database, but there is no unified university alumni database, which is a significant drawback for the universities' effective performance. Newer universities A and B have a unified alumni database probably because they have not encountered the problem of old alumni records and because they have many fewer classes of leavers. Still, the alumni association of university E is in the most grievous situation, in terms of its alumni database, because they do not have access to the university's alumni records. Therefore, this association has to enlarge its alumni database by finding alumni through various social media.

Following the issue of alumni database stands equally important issue of alumni communication strategies. The literature review revealed that effective communication strategies can greatly contribute to the performance of alumni associations. The interviews unveiled the variety of communication strategies used by site universities. For instance, universities A and B use CRF bases through which they reach alumni by sending special mail-outs and weekly newsletters providing useful information to alumni. The alumni association of university E mostly relies on social media such as Facebook, Telegram, or spreads the



information via Whatsapp. At the same time, other alumni associations prefer using personal ties to reach alumni. Thus, they make phone calls or arrange different meetings to reach alumni. An interesting case is presented by the alumni association of university D, which is a recently established alumni association. Having tried the variety of the ways to reach alumni such as website, phone calls, social media, and other events, they came to the conclusion that word-of-mouth advertising is the most effective approach. Thus, Ms D, responses:

Our KPI indicators showed that on account of word-of-mouth advertising [sarafannoe radio], 87 and 97 classes passed the torch to 88 and 78 classes (...), and this way the dissemination of information, through these brand ambassadors of alumni association and people who came here and were well received, is going on, and here is illustrative example, either two meetings with alumni the year before last, or eleven meetings outreaching more than 800 people last year.

Because the alumni association of university D is a 'young' organization, it is vital to make a name for itself first. Understanding this, the same person continues "in the first place it is necessary to start awareness-raising campaign that such association exists. Otherwise, until people know that there is an alumni association the business will not get off the ground".

Consequently, based on available resources and the stage of the development of an alumni association, six universities employ different communication strategies, and more often a combination of various communication strategies. For instance, universities A and C issue alumni magazines every year. Such magazines feature outstanding alumni and tell the stories of their successes. Besides that such magazines contain information on recent news about university life and social events, while providing information on open vacancies.

The activities of alumni associations also vary contingent on the stage of the development of the alumni association. For instance, if newer alumni associations are

managing only a few projects, such as alumni meetings (university D), or the creation of a fund to support socially vulnerable students (university E), more ‘mature’ alumni associations are running the whole range of possible alumni activities. Thus, universities A and C run alumni days, alumni balls; invite alumni to give lectures, seminars and training; raise funds for the needs of the university; provide scholarships to students, and have infrastructure build on the expense of alumni association, disseminate information on conferences, job openings, scholarships. University B, which is a private organization, went even further as they organize ‘mayevka’ (May picnics), New Years for alumni, organize teambuilding events, provide business courses to its alumni, and even sponsor alumni projects. Though presently activities of these alumni associations illustrate a rather rosy picture, these successes were achieved by building on effort after effort. As remembered by Ms B, from university A:

If five years ago, when we just settled alumni scholarship fund, we were carrying a charity box on every alumni event and we were gathering one hundred thousand tenge for the whole year, last year we gathered almost five million tenge.

Ms A, a colleague of Ms B, supports her words by concluding:

You know, Ms A’ words confirms that our work with alumni is an evidence of the transition from quantity to quality law, i.e. all of the quantitative efforts we do as a department they now turn into this kind of form, and we are glad that our alumni became active, they announce initiatives, they suggest something themselves, and we are glad as we worked towards this.

I absolutely agree with the opinion of Ms A about the law of transition from quantity to quality as no sustainable success is achieved with a modicum of efforts. It took these alumni associations from seventeen to seven years to lead the alumni association through stages of

investing and giving until they reached the stage of reaping and enjoying the fruits of their labor.

### **Alumni support**

The theme of alumni support has been frequently raised by research participants. The interviewees distinguish between material and non-material support which has also been covered in the literature review. Thus, respondents divide between service to the university and financial contributions. For instance, Ms C, from university B, specifies:

They (alumni association) actually hold many informal, but connected to the work of the university, meetings with alumni. They (alumni) raise funds; provide employment and internship opportunities to students; they also take an active part in the university's activity. In particular, they organize master classes, read lectures, give presentations, take an active part in seminars, forums, or organize themselves other events in the university.

It has been extensively mentioned that alumni assist in providing internship places for current students as well as work places for fresh graduates. The majority agreed that university alumni are invited to develop new as well as monitor and improve existing academic programs. Such cooperation was considered by the respondents as beneficial for university in terms of connection to the labor market. Thus, Mr E from university C responds "interaction with alumni, presently employers, is necessary to adapt academic process to the requirements of labor market". Another respondent, Ms X, from university B, supports this idea as she asserts "this contributes to real connection of university with existing economy, industry". Another commonly provided support in face of alumni is lectures, training, and master classes. It is noteworthy that alumni do not only give lectures on academic issues, but also come to share their life experiences to motivate current students. For instance, Ms Z, believes "when

students see these successful, young, (...), beautiful, and wealthy alumni, of course they see what awaits them in the future”. Other non-material support which was distinguished by respondents is assistance in the organization of events, as well as alumni as word-of-mouth supporters.

Material support includes Master and PhD scholarships from alumni, various gifts to schools, building of new infrastructure, equipping of laboratories, provision of need-based scholarships, as well as donations to alumni funds. Material support is important not only for its added value for the university’s financial assets, but mostly for building the image of the university. Thus, Ms Z, from university C, stresses:

As you might know the alumni association of our university is very active. Many facilities were built on money raised by this association such as arch, swimming pool; and all these beautiful objects not only decorate our university but also have a function of building assertive image of our university.

Another issue which stands out as a separate theme for discussion is the creation of an endowment fund. Proceeding from the understanding of an endowment fund which differs from other funds in ensuring the long-term financial health by using the earnings from investments, the only HEI endowment fund directed on accumulation of nominal capital, was established at university C. Despite understanding of the added value of such a fund for university, only one out of six universities has established an endowment fund while others established more of the student scholarships funds. Thus two universities provide need-based scholarships financed by alumni funds. However, there is a potential to further develop the existing alumni funds into university endowment funds as history has proven that the best investment an endowment fund can make is time.

The above presented findings allow concluding that alumni serve both as collaborators and contributors to the site universities. However, if we refer back to Heckman and Guskey' theory of discretionary collaborative behavior, this kind of behavior is always bilateral. Then if universities receive alumni support what do alumni get in return? In the case of the site universities, they provide the following support to alumni: alumni ID, professional networking, PR services, discounts for training, conferences and further education, development courses organized by the alumni association, and financial support of alumni business projects. These kinds of support vary from university to university. However, everybody agreed that alumni come and help the university without apparent benefits for themselves. When asking the participants about pay back benefits for alumni the majority of them referred to "love and gratitude", "alumni enthusiasm", "alumni good will", and "alumni internal conviction". Following this, it is possible to suggest that alumni support rests on the feeling of loyalty which alumni have towards alma mater.

### **Alumni loyalty**

The theme of alumni loyalty has been constantly emerging during the data analysis. Thus the respondents referred to alumni loyalty whenever they spoke about alumni support. Proceeding from the definition of alumni loyalty by Iskhakova, Hoffman, and Hilbert "Alumni loyalty is the faithfulness or devotion of alumni, based on two interrelated components: attitudinal (intention to alumni loyalty) and behavioral (action loyalty)" (2017, p. 29), it is possible to suggest that alumnus (a)' feeling of faithfulness and devotion to their alma mater is realized through action loyalty, and therefore is closely connected to alumni support. This could be evidenced in practice as Ms V, an administrative employee of university C, observes "having graduated from university alumni can start working in other higher education

institutions or in other places, but they still miss university and therefore come to provide any possible support”. However, quantitative findings have shown that the majority of the surveyed students are not loyal to their alma mater as they did not express any willingness to take on alumni identity salience or alumni roles. Then the question arises: which factors, according to interviewees, can contribute to alumni loyalty? The following section presents participants’ beliefs and opinions on this topic.

Surprisingly, the respondents mentioned strict admission criteria as a factor which contributes to alumni loyalty. For instance, Ms I, an external expert on alumni associations in Kazakhstan, when asked about why alumni at her school are so devoted to their alma mater, responds “because there was and there is rigorous selection process, at the moment the system remains the same and therefore it is one of the best, and the list of school alumni proves this fact”. Another participant, Ms Z, from University C, connects alumni loyalty to internal culture “We have strong internal culture firstly because unordinary people enter our school, we are not ‘transit lane’ school, it is really hard to enter our school, and we have limited number of scholarships”. Another distinctive, but yet justified in literature, opinion was expressed by Mr P, who believes “In order for alumni to feel nostalgia for university the time has to pass, fresh alumni do not want to help university yet”. Probably, the problem is not in fresh alumni’s unwillingness, but in their inability to help due to objective reasons. As Mr F, thinks:

We have people there but it is very hard to convince them and our fund and nowadays all the people are suffering consequences of the world economic crisis: prices have gone up, it is very hard to find extra money, to support funds, this is the first thing, and also they are young, they need to create family, they need accommodation, they need cars, they are saving money for more important things as they think.

Another factor which emerged as one contributing to alumni loyalty is relevant upbringing. Thus, Mr B, suggests:

In the beginning love and the willingness to continue relationships with alma mater are formed from the first course, when it is necessary to nurture the feeling of love towards a university, in a good sense of this word, from the very first course.

This opinion then finds support in other respondents' answers, as Ms Z states:

We cultivate alumni personality in our students because this status implies rights and responsibilities, it is an honor, when becoming alumni you must treat students as other alumni treated you when you were a student. (...). You must help and patronize, i.e. if you have an opportunity to provide scholarship. And we have this, it is becoming the norm, and this is rewarding. In general, the continuity of generations is rather strong in our university, and especially in our school probably due to our paucity, and this is our advantage.

The other topic, which flows out of the upbringing issue being discussed, is the continuity of generations. The interviewees report that those students who have received material support from alumni are more likely to help students when becoming alumni themselves. Thus, Ms B, from university A, states "Those alumni (who received alumni support) are now calling us and say that they also want to help".

These findings are not surprising as it is easily understandable that those who received support themselves now thrive to return the favor. However, what about other factors which contribute to alumni loyalty? The majority of the respondents both directly and indirectly referred to academic excellence which contributes to a successful start in life. For instance, Ms D provides an example of one famous school in Almaty:

This school ensured a start in life for talented people (...), and there are so many successful people who hold key positions (...), and their alumni are so grateful to school, and they all, almost without exception, approximately 98% of them, according to our observations, participate in the activity of the alumni association of this school.

A representative of another university, Mr B, concurs with this opinion as he asserts “If a student is not satisfied with the quality of education, if all these four or two years in bachelor or master program he spent dissatisfied then it would be wrong to expect something from him”.

The last factor which was distinguished by respondents as a factor contributing to alumni loyalty is students’ involvement in extracurricular activities. Thus some of the respondents believe that socially active students are then becoming socially active alumni. They appeal to the following “Socially active students have more memories about student life and long more for their student past than those who were not engaged in extracurricular activities”. Though this opinion finds support in the literature, the quantitative findings did not prove this hypothesis.

To conclude this group of findings it is vital to refer back to Heckman and Guskey who claim that a healthy collaborative relationship could be built if both alumni and university perform discretionary behavior which goes beyond formal obligations. In other words, if universities expect alumni to be loyal to their alma mater then they have to give students something more than just quality education or socializing opportunities. In this regard, I would like to site the words of Mr B, who fairly noticed “After graduation we reap the fruits of our attitude to students, i.e. the issue of alumni should be addressed from the moment of student’s enrollment in university so we will have any moral right to expect loyalty from alumni”.



To conclude the qualitative findings it is essential to assess selected alumni associations against the criteria which emerged as consistent codes when describing the activity of alumni associations. Such criteria include creation of unified alumni database, availability of CRM systems, existing alumni communication strategies, alumni association activities, and development of alumni funds (see Table 17).

Table 17

*Assessment of Alumni Associations of the Site Universities against Selected Criteria.*

	Alumni database	CRM system	Alumni communication strategies	Alumni association activities	Alumni funds
University A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
University B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
University C	-	-	✓	✓	✓
University D	✓	-	✓	✓	-
University E	-	-	✓	✓	✓
University F	-	-	-	-	-

The assessment of the selected alumni associations revealed that the best model of an alumni association is presented by university A which is a joint-stock company. The alumni association of this university developed a university-wide alumni database which is used to disseminate information among alumni through CRM system. To reach its alumni this association sends weekly newsletter with useful and interesting for alumni information about coming events, meetings, or open vacancies. Moreover, this newsletter has a link following which an alumnus(a) can update his or her profile. Together with this, the association utilizes social media to maintain regular contact with alumni and issues alumni magazine once a year to tell the stories of successful alumni. The effectiveness of these communication strategies lies in their regularity. Thus, alumni already know that once a week they will be updated on coming events and meetings, while having opportunities to run a discussion in social media. In regards to association's activities, the association issues alumni ID cards, invites alumni to

participate in lectures and meetings, attracts alumni to alumni advisory board to revise academic programs, runs leadership development programs, raises funds, organizes reunions, and runs other projects with the involvement of alumni. Besides that, the association founded an alumni scholarship fund to support students with low socio-economic background. Similar to university A, university B which is a private organization, could boast of activities run by alumni association and alumni support provided. Sound and regular communications strategies, unified alumni database and availability of CRM system put this alumni association at an advantage over alumni associations at other universities. For instance university C, which is a national university, is the only university which established an endowment fund. The projects run by this association involve: “Our elite”, “Alumni Day”, “Career path”, “Alumni business development”, and “Alumni ID”. These activities translate into various alumni support including equipping of the labs, building of new infrastructure and supporting students with stipends. However, building on the rich history of the university, the association is focused mostly on old and distinguished graduates as they believe that “in order for alumni to feel nostalgia for university the time has to pass”. Together with this, absence of a university-wide alumni database and CRM system automatically sift out fresh graduates from participating in university life after graduation. This is the major drawback of an alumni association of university C. The newer alumni associations of universities D and E, though do not meet all of the criteria, have a potential to be developed into a successful network of loyal and committed to university alumni.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented main research findings on students’ alumni identity salience and role expectations. The issues of gender and family income were discussed in relation to students’ alumni saliencies. Moreover, the present situation of alumni associations of the site

universities was described in the qualitative part of the chapter. This part also focused on the experiences of the selected alumni associations.

Next chapter will discuss the findings of the present study in relation to the literature on alumni associations.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Alumni research in the context of Kazakhstan has led to many interesting findings which are illustrated in the findings section. To help organize this discussion and ground it well in findings and theory, the chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss selected alumni associations in relation to the type of institution at which they were developed. Next, I present the understandings of alumni associations within the Kazakhstani context. Last, I speculate on the roles alumni associations perform in higher education sector by comparing them to those in the US.

### **Universities and alumni associations.**

The assessment of the site universities against the criteria, which emerged as a result of the data analysis, revealed that the alumni associations meeting all of the criteria are those of universities A and B, when university A is a joint-stock company and university B is a private university. Both universities could be characterized as relatively small and ‘young’ universities which nevertheless are reputable and recognized for their distinguished academic programs. These characteristics could explain the success of the alumni associations in these universities as the studies in the US showed that the size and the legal-organizational form of a university or a college are directly linked to alumni participation rates. In particular, the study by Brady, Utter and Noble (1998) revealed that private universities in comparison to public institutions demonstrate a higher solicitation effectiveness ratio, whereas the study by Levine (2008) confirmed that smaller higher education institutions have higher participation rates than larger ones. This opinion was also supported by the research participants who believe that the development of alumni associations is contingent on the legal-organizational form, different

approaches to university management and the varying extent of bureaucratization in particular universities. Another opinion explaining higher participation rates among alumni in these universities refers to the image of the university. For instance, one of the participants provides an example of league universities alumni who wear “special shirts, class rings, badges” to identify themselves with the universities from which they graduated. Certainly, universities A and B cannot be compared with those from the league tables, but still in the Kazakhstani context they are perceived as prestigious and outstanding. Moreover, these universities offer MBA programs and as stated by Okunade and Berl (1997) school of business degrees is a significant predictor of alumni giving. The representatives of these universities also noticed higher participation rates among alumni of their business schools who use alumni association as a platform for professional networking and PR services.

However, there is another example of a successful alumni association presented by university C, which is a national university. Still, the alumni association of this university stands as a separate legal entity with its own statutes and regulations. Moreover, they decide on the appointments with the board of alumni as the main decision-making body. Though the alumni association did not develop a university-wide alumni database they could boast about substantial donations to the endowment fund and various alumni support. This alumni association relies mostly on ‘mature’ and distinguished alumni which can also explain high participation rates among alumni. Thus, it was claimed by research participants that the older alumni become the higher is the probability that alumni will support alma mater. This finding is consistent with the findings of Okunade and Berl (1997), Belfield and Beney (2000), Sun, Hoffman, Grady (2007), and Le Blanc and Rucks (2008). These authors in different years investigated the factors influencing the probability of alumni giving. There are several reasons why “the participation rate in alumni donation rises with the increase of class age” (Sun,

Hoffman, Grady, 2007, p. 309). One of these reasons is connected with the increase of alumni wealth as alumni become older (Gaier, 2001). The same reason was also mentioned by some of the research participants who claimed that fresh graduates are first to build their lives after graduation, i.e. the probability to donate increases with age because older alumni have more resources and opportunities to donate compared to their younger counterparts. At the same time, not only probability to donate rises with the age, but also the probability of being members of alumni associations (Newman & Petrosko, 2011), the likelihood to promote institutions to others (Hanson, 2000), and alumni loyalty (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2016). The results of the quantitative part of the present research confirms other findings as it was revealed that students aged 18 to 21 years are less likely to be alumni than those over 25 years old. However, does it mean that in order for universities to raise funds they should focus only on older alumni? The same authors as well as university representatives believe that universities should focus on current students as well, so that when they have the opportunities to provide material support to alma mater the relationship is already in place (Gaier, 2001; Sun, Hoffman, Grady, 2007).

The examples provided by the alumni associations of universities A, B and C demonstrate different approaches to running alumni associations. Thus, in two universities alumni associations are part of the university structure, while one stands as a separate legal entity. Moreover, universities A and B are quite 'young' and small universities compared to university C. Probably, their paucity and short history of existence made it easier for them to develop a university-wide alumni database and forced them to focus both on fresh and mature graduates. However, in the case of university C which is a big and old university, the development of a unified alumni database could become an issue just as happened to university D. In a similar vein, university C can afford to 'pick and choose' alumni from a big

number of classes of leavers. Together with this, these universities differ in their approaches to managing alumni associations. In particular, universities A and B are western-oriented universities and this is reflected in the activities alumni associations run, whereas university C is an old-fashioned ‘statuesque’ university which applies different strategies to managing alumni association. Therefore, the alumni association of this university resembles a mixture of western (board of alumni) and soviet approaches (top-down initiatives) to running an alumni association.

### **Understanding alumni associations within the Kazakhstani context.**

Another question which piques my research interest is: What is an alumni association in Kazakhstan? To answer this question it is necessary to describe the context within which such understanding could be framed. As fairly noticed by one of the research participants in our old Soviet understanding an alumni association “means getting together once a year or once in a decade in meetings [toi], where alumni meet and in a best-case scenario make a gift, excursion to alma mater, and that is it”. Such a limited understanding of alumni associations is rooted in the Soviet legacy and the novelty of the phenomenon for Kazakhstani HEIs. Probably, this lies in the fact that in Soviet times higher education was free and central authorities provided enough economic resources for educational development (Yakavets, 2014); as a result there was no need for higher education institutions to look for supporters in their alumni. Meanwhile in the US, the competitive market of higher education sector forced institutions of higher education to find allies and supporters in their alumni (Muller, 1986, p. 7). Together with this, “isolation from international trends and practices, because of its ideological underpinnings” (Rudista, 2004, as cited in Ahn, Dixon, & Chekmareva, 2018, p. 202) deferred the development of alumni culture in Kazakhstan for decades. As a natural result, the majority

of students (60.1%) who participated in the present research are not acquainted with the activities of alumni associations, and what is more important, have never heard about them.

Certainly, there are examples of the site universities which established alumni associations and have different understandings of an alumni association, but these are just a few cases more outliers in the system of higher education in Kazakhstan. When asking the representatives of the site universities about their understanding of alumni associations the majority associated them with alumni support and alumni loyalty. The qualitative analysis of their answers allows concluding that alumni association is a network of loyal and committed university alumni who participate in university life in terms of internship places, employment, sponsorship, and scholarships to students in return for 'a start in life' assured by the alma mater. This understanding differs from that of the Soviet one while reflecting participants' awareness of the roles alumni perform in alumni associations.

#### **The roles of alumni associations in Kazakhstan.**

In addition to narrow understanding of alumni associations, the roles alumni associations perform in Kazakhstani higher education sector are also limited to bridging university with alumni. Due to the novelty of this phenomenon for higher education institutions and their graduates, it is vital to firstly raise awareness among students and graduates about alumni associations, their activities and roles they perform in the university life. The limited role of alumni associations could be evidenced in the support provided by university graduates. The qualitative analysis results revealed that alumni support alma mater mostly in terms of providing internship places, revising academic programs, giving lectures and seminars, and meeting with current students. Only 19% of the overall codes for alumni support are connected to material support. The quantitative results confirm these findings as the majority of the study participants (senior students) are more likely to support university



through volunteering rather than through financial contributions. If applying the concept of alumni-university relationship (Gallo, 2013) to graduates of the selected universities, it becomes apparent that they are still at the 'engagement stage' which is characterized as the stage at which alumni start participating in university events such as reunions, networking events or special interest groups.

In contrast, in the US, based on the analysis of the literature, alumni associations perform the role of fundraising ventures. Over the last twenty years philanthropic giving to higher education institutions quintupled from 4.2 billion to over 23 billion dollars (Quigley, Bingham, & Murray, 2002), and reached its peak in 2008 with over 31 billion dollars in donations (McDearmon, 2012). Still, there are authors who would question the role of an alumni association as a fundraising venture. For instance, Gaier (2001) asserts that the main role of an alumni association "is not to raise funds for the university but to raise friends of the university. Yet, the ability to raise a friendship to the university was being hampered by the misperception of the role of the alumni association" (p. 10). Though I partially agree with Gaier, I would add that such understanding of the roles of the alumni association in the US is underpinned by the development stage of these associations. Together with this, the culture of philanthropic giving has been cultivated for centuries and tax relief policies encourage university graduates to make financial contributions to the endowment funds.

Besides the initial stage in the development of Kazakhstani alumni associations, an underdeveloped culture of alumni giving and absence of encouragement mechanisms, another issue which stands as a stumbling block on the way towards greater financial support is lack of trust. The issue of trust which was frequently raised by the research participants, and which is connected to the transparency of operations around alumni funds, could restrain alumni from donating to alumni funds. In order to address the issue of transparency some alumni

associations use Taiburyl system. This system grants access to fund's bank account by every donator at any time which allows the donators to monitor how much money was accumulated and how it was spent. Online voting and donating are other mechanisms in service of alumni associations. These mechanisms mitigate the issue of trust and transparency, while providing flexibility to alumni associations contributors.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the research findings grounded in the literature. It was found that the development of an alumni association is contingent on several factors including institutional characteristics of higher education institutions. Together with this, this section attempted to provide an understanding of alumni associations within the Kazakhstani context while speculating on the roles they perform in the higher education sector.

The next chapter will present the conclusions of the study as well as recommendations for alumni associations in Kazakhstani HEIs.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary of the research findings and provides recommendations for administrators in Kazakhstani HEIs. The purpose of the present study was to learn the opinions of university officials and undergraduates towards alumni associations in Kazakhstan. Together with this, the study aimed to assess how university undergraduate students view their role with alma maters after graduation as well as examine the experience of universities which have already established alumni associations.

Proceeding from the purpose of the present study, the following chapter presents the conclusions of the research findings and discussion part. The second part of this chapter is devoted to practical recommendations to university officials of Kazakhstani higher education institutions and alumni associations.

### **Concluding findings and discussion**

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed considerable differences in understanding of alumni association by university officials of the site universities and their senior students. Thus, while university officials have an explicit understanding of alumni associations and are positive about their future in Kazakhstan, the majority of undergraduate students lack a proper understanding of alumni associations and do not incorporate the role of alumnus(a) into their own sense of identity. In addition, it was found that the development of alumni associations varies among the universities. The discussion of the findings and literature infers that the success of alumni associations is contingent on the size and the legal-organizational form of a higher education institution. In particular, the assessment of the site universities against the criteria, which emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis, unveiled that the two universities which meet these criteria are characterized as small non-state

universities. Seemingly, the more financially independent from the state university is the more creative it is in income-generating businesses. In light of the current reform towards fiscal autonomy, in the nearest future, it is feasible that state universities will also need to diversify their incomes independent of state appropriations. However, alumni associations in Kazakhstan have not yet reached the final – support stage in their development, and perform more of the role of bridging alumni and universities. Nevertheless, I still agree with Ms D, a representative of university D, who believes that:

In Kazakhstan, in the post-socialist world in general, there is the correct attitude towards the future of children, towards receiving higher education. Consequently, a constant flow of students is ensured. This means that blood, arterial circulation inside alumni associations is ensured, and alumni associations will be constantly replenished.

This uncontested fact creates tremendous hope that the culture of alumni associations and alumni giving will be developed in the nearest future building on infinite resources of higher education institutions – alumni.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of the present study and literature allow making several recommendations:

First, it is essential to hold awareness-raising campaigns among current students and alumni. Strictly speaking, it is crucial for Kazakhstani HEIs to educate current students and alumni about the activities of alumni associations and the roles they perform in the system of higher education, as the culture of such organizations in Kazakhstan is still developing. It is well-documented in the literature and supported by present findings that any awareness-raising campaigns held by universities among current students and alumni significantly contribute to the involvement of alumni in university's life after graduation. These results are accurate both for international and local contexts.

Second, it is necessary to adopt comprehensive strategies in reaching alumni. This involves adopting of more segmentation in alumni association's approaches to graduates. Previous findings together with the findings of the present study revealed the existence of heterogeneous groups of alumni whose interests vary from school to school and from one age group to another age group. Therefore, a mass relationship marketing approach should be put behind if long-term relationships with alumni are desired. Thus, for business school graduates, alumni associations may perform the role of a platform for professional networking; older alumni may realize their 'attitudinal loyalty' (faithfulness and devotion to their alma mater) through 'action loyalty' (material support), while younger graduates may consider membership in alumni associations as employment opportunities.

Last, but not the least important one involves more 'technical' recommendations regarding the development of alumni database and comprehensive communication strategies. It is vital to view the development of the university alumni database as "an investment in the institution's infrastructure" (Gallo, 2012, p. 45) as without alumni database and sound communication strategies it would not be possible to reach and involve the main resources of alumni associations – alumni themselves. In this regard, the examples of universities A and B are worth to be followed.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A:

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS

**Title: “Alumni associations in Kazakhstan: Building the future of higher education institutions through its graduates”**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the topic of alumni associations aimed to understand how alumni associations are perceived by undergraduate senior students and university administration. You were selected as research participants because of your current position at the university’s administration or because you have worked or are working in/with alumni associations. You will be asked to answer the interview questions which is planned to take you 45-60 minutes.

Based on how the questions are formulated in the interview questionnaire, there are not any apparent risks in this study. You may benefit from the study’s results by learning new ways of organizing and managing alumni associations to enhance their work. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are**

**otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, Ali Ait Si Mhamed, [ali.mhamed@nu.edu.kz](mailto:ali.mhamed@nu.edu.kz), +7 (7172) 70 9367

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz)

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

**The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.**

## **Appendix B:**

### **SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**Title: “Alumni associations in Kazakhstan: Building the future of higher education institutions through its graduates”**

Dear participants!

The present survey is conducted within the master’s research on the topic of alumni associations in Kazakhstan trying to answer the following research question:

In the context of the policies and reforms of universities towards autonomy in Kazakhstan, how do university officials and students understand and foresee the future of alumni associations?

What I am basically interested in is in students’, especially senior university students’ opinions about alumni associations.

The information you provided will help me understand your attitudes towards alumni associations, academic and social experience at your higher education institution, and the level of satisfaction with your experience.

The information you provide will be confidential and your identities will never be disclosed. Please fill in survey based on your own beliefs and experiences. Answering the survey will take you about 10 minutes.

Filling this survey serves as your agreement to participate in the research. Thank you very much for your time and your information.

## Part 1 – General information

1. Your gender
  - a) Male b) Female
2. Your age
  - a) 18-21 b) 22-25 c) 25-over
3. Is it your first academic degree
  - a) Yes b) No
4. Who is funding your study?
  - a) Self-funded b) parents c) state-funded d) rector's grant e) privately funded f) other
5. What is your family's monthly income?
  - a) 50 000 – 150 000 b) 150 000 – 250 000 c) 250 000 – 350 000 d) 350 000 and above
6. Have you/your family/relatives/friends/acquaintances been engaged in charity associated activities?
  - a) Yes b) No c) Don't know

## Part 2 – Academic and Social experience

7. What is your overall GPA for the last semester?
  - a) 2.5-3 b) 3-3.5 c) 3.5-4
8. I am satisfied with my classes and how professors teach
  - a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
9. I am satisfied with communication with my teachers
  - a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree



10. I am satisfied with the service provided by university administration
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
11. I am satisfied with communication with university administration
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
12. I am engaged in university's sport clubs
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
13. I am engaged in university's art clubs
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
14. I am engaged in university's social events:
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
15. I am a member of the university's student council:
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
16. I am satisfied with the extracurricular activities and services provided by the university
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree
17. I am satisfied with communication with my peers
- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

Part 3 – Role identity part

18. Have you ever heard about alumni associations?
- a) Yes b) No
19. How do you feel about alumni association?
- a) Positive b) Neutral c) Negative
20. Being an alumnus (a) is something I often think about (Salience1).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

21. I really don't have any clear feelings about being an alumnus(a) (Salienc2).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

22. For me, being an alumnus (a) means more than just contributing money or time (Salienc3).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

23. Being an alumnus (a) is an important part of who I am (Salienc4).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

24. I would feel lost if I were not an alumnus (a) (Salienc5).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

25. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through financial contributions (donations or gifts) (Role1).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

26. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through volunteering (Role2).

a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly agree

27. As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend alumni events (on- and off-campus)  
(Role3).

- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly  
agree

28. As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to serve on a university board or committee  
(Role4).

- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly  
agree

29. As an alumnus (a), I am expected to attend athletic events (Role5)

- a) Strongly disagree b) disagree c) agree to some extent d) agree c) strongly  
agree

