



## Giving Something Back: Alumni Donations to Universities of Education in Taiwan

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### Abstract

Faced with declining student numbers and decreasing government grants, universities around Taiwan are increasingly compelled to search for alternative sources of revenue to meet their financial needs. Donations made by alumni constitute a major component of these supplemental sources of revenue. The purpose of this research was to determine the factors that influence alumni donations to universities, and to measure the relative importance of each of these factors. A survey of 292 alumni from four different universities of education was carried out. The results reveal that the average amount donated by alumni to various organizations over a period of five years was US\$380, of which only US\$16.5 went to the donor's alma mater. Thus it is clear that universities need to implement more effective fundraising campaigns to obtain better results. Moreover, different types of fundraising programs have dramatically different effects on different donor groups. Therefore, the use of several different fundraising programs, instead of one unified program, can enhance fundraising results.

**Keywords:** Educational finance, Educational marketing, Higher education, Fundraising, Alumni giving

### 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, institutions of higher education in Taiwan have rapidly expanded from 22 to 147, but without a commensurate increase in government funding. At the same time there has been a sharp fall in tuition revenues due to decreasing enrollment, leading to a general decline in the amount of financial resources available to universities. As a result, institutes of higher education in both the private and public sectors are desperately searching for alternative sources of revenue to meet their financial needs, and a major component of these new revenue sources consists of alumni donations.

Alumni donations are the most important source of supplemental funds for institutions of higher education in the US (Chow, 1993; Pully, 2001), and have risen to constitute 26.6% of all donations to universities in 2005 (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006). In Taiwan, however, alumni donations are comparatively meager. This is especially true for universities of education (formerly called "normal colleges/universities"). Although these institutions have received a new designation over the past decade, their main purpose remains the training of primary and secondary school teachers.

In Taiwan, it is generally believed that university of education alumni do not give to their alma maters as generously as their counterparts from other types of universities. This assumption is based on the fact that almost all graduates of universities of education become teachers or school administrators, positions which provide a stable but rather modest

salary (at least for junior teachers), resulting in a relatively small amount of disposable income for making donations. Although this scenario would seem logical enough, no research has been done to empirically investigate this assumption. Moreover, in the past decade many researchers have investigated donor activities in Taiwan, but none have focused on the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of university of education graduates. Given the critical shortage of funds and the lack of fundraising knowledge and skills available to universities of education in Taiwan, it is important to conduct empirical research on this topic and provide guidance which can help these schools improve the results of their fundraising efforts.

Hence, this research aimed to: 1) examine the accuracy of the widespread belief that university of education graduates don't donate very much money; 2) if this is indeed true, investigate the reasons for the lack of donations; 3) determine the fundraising techniques which appeal most to these alumni; and 4) based on the results, provide suggestions which universities of education can use to enhance the results of their fundraising efforts.

The rest of this article is structured into four sections. The first section, based mainly on research done in the US, stresses the importance of alumni donations to the financial wellbeing of universities of education, and reviews the literature that has attempted to identify the main determinants of alumni giving. The second section discusses research methodology, including the validity and reliability of the datasets and statistical methods used in this research. The third section presents the results of the questionnaire. In the fourth section, the implications of the findings are discussed, and suggestions are provided for improving fundraising results and for conducting further research.

## 2. Literature Review

Alumni donations are an important source of revenue for colleges and universities in the US, but such donations are extremely scant in Taiwan. Although this can be partially attributed to cultural differences, it would seem that a lack of fundraising knowledge and skills, especially in soliciting alumni donations, is an important contributing factor. This research aims to examine the issues relating to alumni giving, with a special focus on universities of education. Past research has found that alumni donations to universities depend both on donor characteristics (e.g., their motivation and geodemographic characteristics) and the university's fundraising efforts, both of which will be discussed in detail below.

Nichols (2004) argued that in the twentieth century, organizations seeking donations could assume that they had only one audience; i.e., all their donors bore similar characteristics. Today, however, potential donor segments are differentiated by generation, ethnicity, gender, and so on, and each donor segment reacts differently to different fundraising strategies. Thus, in order to increase the results of their fundraising efforts, schools need to first distinguish between different groups of prospective donors, and then determine how these donor segments respond to different fundraising strategies. In his comprehensive study on the subject, Okunade (1994) concluded that alumni giving is strongly associated with geodemographic factors such as whether the donor has children; the children's ages; and the donor's household income level, age and occupation. Wolpert (1997) claimed that geodemographic characteristics, educational experience, and other social characteristics all have a significant bearing on alumni giving. However, since it is easiest to identify and locate alumni according to their geodemographic characteristics, universities and other nonprofit organizations tend to rely on them when carrying out market segmentation and targeting. More recently, Zappala and Lyons (2006) pointed out that an organization's location—urban, suburban, or rural—as well as its proximity to the prospective donor's residence and workplace also significantly influence the results of a university's fundraising efforts.

Why certain people choose to donate money to certain institutions has been a major topic of fundraising research. Kotler and Andreasen (1996) classified the motivations for donating to educational institutions as: appreciation towards the school; a desire to cultivate talent; philanthropy; tax incentives; impatience with repeated solicitations; and recognition of a university's achievements. Similarly, Chow (1993) claimed that the main reasons for alumni giving can be classified into: gratitude towards one's alma mater; the school's reputation; recognition of the school's achievements; a desire to cultivate talent; tax deductions; and nostalgia. He stressed that showing gratitude to one's alma mater is extremely important in Taiwan due to the strong Chinese tradition of reciprocation, which encourages people to pay back more than what they have received from others. After analyzing many different motivations, Mixer (1993) concluded that sometimes altruism and the pure joy of giving are also catalysts for giving.

McGuire (2003) stressed that donors are particularly interested in knowing how their contributions will be spent. Therefore it is important to lay out the goal in front of the potential donors, explain to them how the goal will be reached, and help them envision the coming fruits of the fundraising campaign. Wedgeworth (2000) also declared that a successful fundraising campaign must set specific goals. He further stressed that the goals should be compelling enough to generate excitement about the institution's future, but without being unrealistic. Harrison, Mitchell, and Peterson (1995) found that fundraising campaigns that specify which university departments are in need of alumni donations are more effective in generating contributions, and that fundraising messages delivered by somebody known to the potential donors are more likely to be fruitful. Shi (1995) highlighted the importance of nostalgia and gratitude relating to one's

alma mater, claiming that people with a preexisting connection to an organization, and who share its values and know about its activities, are more likely to contribute to its success. Therefore, fundraising appeals delivered by teachers, students and school administrators are likely to be more attractive to alumni. McGuire (2003), however, argued that recognition of a university's achievements is the crucial factor in motivating alumni giving. He suggested that universities can no longer appeal to donors based only on nostalgia, but must also articulate specific visions and strengths that their constituencies will be willing to support. He also pointed out the importance of notable school members assuring donors that their contributions will be used efficiently. Hager, Rooney, and Pollak (2002) found that an organization's executive director plays a key role in fundraising, and that board members, program staff, and volunteers play lesser roles. Chang (2000) argued that, due to the great respect Taiwanese society accords to those who play prominent roles in the community, the most effective fundraising appeals are those sent out by people who occupy key posts, such as the school's president and the head of the alumni association.

In order to address the meager results of university fundraising efforts in Taiwan, it is necessary to understand and implement the best practices used in other countries, at the same time learning from their mistakes. Hence, it is also important to examine the reasons for *not* giving. Mixer (1993) found many reasons for not donating, including: a parsimonious personality; poor communication between alumni and their alma mater; overly-frequent solicitation campaigns; bad timing; and past misuse of donations. Harrison et al. (1995) argued that acknowledgement and recognition of alumni donations enhances the probability of giving in the future. Nonetheless, Quigley, Bingham, and Murray (2002) found that overly-frequent (more than twice in a year) communication with donors has a negative effect on their future giving behavior. This is because alumni may perceive the additional communications as intrusive, or an attempt to pressure them for additional support over and beyond that which they have already given. Moreover, "vanity gifts" or various types of recognition—often used by universities—may also be perceived by alumni as manipulative, and cause them to contribute less in the future, or to not contribute at all. Chang (2004) claimed that many people do not donate simply because they feel they do not possess enough disposable income, while others feel that the organization or the solicitation programs are not deserving of their money. Lu (1999) asserted that lack of time and money are the two most frequent reasons for not donating, and that people are not likely to donate again if they believe that their past donations were misused in some way. Schenke and O'Neil (2006) found that donors like to be kept abreast of events, and appreciate receiving recognition for their donations, especially if donor lists are based on amount of donation rather than alphabetical order. However, Quigley et al. (2002) argued that some alumni may not like having their name and the amount of their donation revealed to other alumni, especially if their contribution was small. Thus they warn that printing donation amounts next to donors' names results in fewer donations from those who would otherwise be willing to offer a small donation.

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gather general information about alumni giving patterns, and the subjects were university of education alumni in Taiwan. A self-administered questionnaire developed specifically for this study was used as the main tool for data collection. For the ANOVA analysis, the dependent variable was donation size, and the independent variables were alumni gender, age, income level, professional status, and the location of their alma mater. For the correspondence analysis, the fundraising variables were motivation for donating; intended use of donations; and the reasons for not giving. The alumni background variables were alumni age; income level; and the location of their alma mater.

The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts including five professors of educational finance and/or educational marketing, and minor adjustments were carried out based on their suggestions. The draft questionnaire was then administered to 200 alumni as a pre-test, and Chronbach's  $\alpha$  was adopted as the main method for testing the reliability of the questionnaire. A Chronbach's  $\alpha$  of .89 indicated that the questions had very high reliability. Moreover, by analyzing the changes in Chronbach's  $\alpha$  as a result of deleting a particular item, we found no deletions resulted in an increase in reliability. Thus we kept all the questions in the formal questionnaire.

The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale, in which a response of "1" indicated strong disagreement with the statement, and "5" indicated strong agreement. Moreover, since correspondence analysis requires categorical data as input, we converted the 5-point Likert scale into a discrete form by counting participants who selected 5 as agreeing and the rest as disagreeing.

The sampling method employed was mainly purposive. As suggested by Tudd, Smith, and Kidder (1991), probability sampling may be more representative, but the advantages of nonprobability sampling—convenience and economy—may outweigh those of probability sampling due to practical constraints. Hence, purposive sampling was adopted in this study because the expected low questionnaire retrieval rate could be critical, and also because purposive sampling can identify givers with ideal characteristics. The questionnaires were sent to alumni for whom alumni associations had an accurate mailing address and phone number, who were currently residing in Taiwan, and who expressed willingness to participate in the survey. Moreover, because some alumni associations were only willing to

survey their members under the condition of anonymity, this study does not reveal the names of the universities involved. A total of 520 questionnaires were sent to members of four alumni associations, and 292 were returned, representing a 57% response rate. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS) was employed to conduct the descriptive and inferential analysis. The descriptive analysis of the data was carried out using frequency distribution, and the inferential analysis was carried out using one-way ANOVA and correspondence analysis.

#### 4. Major Findings

##### 4.1 Donation Amount

The first research question asked the respondents how much money they have donated to organizations during the past five years. Out of 292 participants, 161 (55%) reported that they have made at least one donation in the last five years. The average total amount per person was US\$380, of which an average of US\$16.5 (4.3%) went to the respondent's alma mater. Moreover, about 70% of all donations to any organization were less than US\$75, and more than 93% of these donations were less than US\$300 (see figure 1). Thus it can be seen that the great majority of donations made to universities of education were quite small, indicating that these schools need to continue to rely on these small donations while also striving to attract larger donations.

One of the research assumptions was that alumni from different backgrounds differ significantly in the amount of money they donate. Thus we conducted a series of *t* tests and one-way ANOVA and Scheffe post hoc tests to determine the possible differences due to alumni background. The results are summarized as follows: male alumni tended to donate much more to their alma mater (the average amount was US\$28.36) than female alumni (with an average of US\$11.47); older alumni donated more than their younger counterparts; and the average amount for alumni groups aged less than 30, 31–40, 41–50, and over 51 were US\$5.44, US\$11.64, US\$33.65, and US\$52.00, respectively. However, alumni professional status and the location of their alma mater did not significantly impact donation amounts.

##### 4.2 Donor Motivation

The second research objective was to determine what motivates alumni to donate money to their alma mater. The main reasons for making donations were found to be: as an expression of gratitude to one's alma mater for providing a good education; in order to help others enjoy the same; and philanthropy. On the other hand, alumni were less motivated by the expectation of gifts and other perks offered by the university; the prestige associated with making a donation; and the fear of the embarrassment which might result from not making a donation when one's classmates have already done so. These results indicate that alumni donations are somewhat more motivated by a desire to improve the quality of one's alma mater, than by personal benefits.

In addition to investigating the general pattern of alumni giving, this study also examined the influence of background factors on alumni donation patterns. Since "a picture is worth a thousand words," correspondence analysis was used in this research to generate perceptual maps that help to illustrate this influence. Correspondence analysis has been applied to a wide variety of market positioning and other strategy development problems, and is especially suitable for constructing a brief picture that illustrates the comparative positions of nominal items in accordance with impacting factors, thereby clarifying an organization's policy options.

However, correspondence analysis is appropriate only for variables with more than three items (groups). Therefore, we conducted correspondence analyses to examine all of the appropriate background variables—alumni age, income level, and the location of their alma mater. The results show that only the correspondence analyses between alumni age and motivation met the chi square test with a cutoff value of  $p < 0.05$  (see Table 2). Hence we have only one valid map to present.

Figure 2 maps the correspondence between alumni age group and donation motivation. The map clearly indicates that alumni aged 31–40 and those aged less than 30 have very similar donation patterns, and that they are comparatively more motivated by philanthropy and tax breaks than their counterparts in older age groups. Alumni aged 41–50 gave relatively higher scores to showing gratitude to their alma mater and feeling too embarrassed to reject the donation appeal. Finally, participants aged over 50 tend to give more importance to cultivating talent.

This may be due to the fact that teachers below the age of 40 are still getting established in their careers and are receiving relatively modest salaries, leading them to be more frugal. Thus they tend to make extremely small donations, largely as a symbolic gesture. Another important factor is that younger teachers are more knowledgeable about managing personal finances, and thus give more importance to receiving tax breaks. (Although the salaries of primary and secondary teachers in Taiwan are exempt from income tax, teachers are required to pay taxes on other sources of income.) By contrast, teachers between the ages of 41 and 50 are at the peaks of their careers and their salaries have already reached the highest level, which is much higher than the average salary in Taiwan. Thus, due to their relatively comfortable financial position, they are more likely to be willing and able to make a donation to their alma mater in order to express their gratitude. Moreover, teachers above 50 are preparing for retirement or have already done so, and since teacher pensions in Taiwan are quite generous (in fact, a teacher's annual pension is even higher than his/her

former annual salary) they have sufficient disposable income for making donations as a way of giving something back to society. Even after retirement, many teachers remain dedicated to the ideal of fostering talent, and this is reflected in their motivation for making a donation.

Thus, schools planning a fundraising campaign need to keep in mind that gratitude is the most important motivation for alumni giving. Yet such a broad survey of alumni motivation may not be sufficient, and may even result in an ineffective fundraising policy, since different alumni segments may have very different motivations for making a donation. If the difference is very large, but the school bases its fundraising campaign only on the motivations of the majority of alumni, then, even though the school may be successful in encouraging many alumni to donate, they may at the same time lose the support of a significant number of alumni who are atypical in some way. Therefore, knowing which strategy is more appealing to which group of alumni, and the use of several different fund-raising programs instead of one unified program, may enhance fundraising efficiency.

#### *4.3 Intended Use of Donations*

The third research objective was to determine alumni attitudes towards different types of school fundraising campaigns. Fundraising campaigns which are clearly aimed at providing specific benefits to students received the highest rates of alumni approval. These included: assistance for disadvantaged students; scholarships and fellowships; educational equipment and facilities; and campus construction. On the other hand, alumni have comparatively less enthusiasm for fundraising campaigns which expend a large amount of the proceeds on a variety of activities designed to curry favor with alumni or which request donations for unspecified purposes. Thus it can be seen that designing a fundraising campaign which highlights student benefits, and clearly informs alumni as to how the funds will be spent to reach specific goals, will bring better results.

When we examined how alumni attitudes towards different types of school fundraising campaigns might differ in accordance with alumni background, we found that only alumni age level (.012) met the chi-square test of  $p < .05$  (see Table 3). Thus, we include a perceptual map only for the correlation between age level and use of donation (see Figure 3). It is interesting to note that campus construction is much more appealing to alumni aged 50 years or older in comparison to their younger counterparts. This may be because older alumni are relatively more interested in leaving behind an enduring legacy, and contributing to the construction of a new building helps them to do so. In addition, construction projects are generally quite expensive, and, in general, only alumni over 50 have enough disposable income to support such a large undertaking. As can be seen in Figure 3, there is a strong positive correlation between age and inclination to donate towards campus construction. In fact, many of the buildings at universities in Taiwan were constructed with funds provided by alumni associations representing those who graduated long ago. Moreover, as a way of encouraging future donations, many of these buildings have an inscription indicating which classes provided the funds.

#### *4.4 Reasons for Not Donating*

The last objective of this study was to investigate the reasons which deter alumni from making financial contributions to their alma maters, and it is quite surprising that respondents rated almost all of the reasons in the questionnaire very highly. The most important reasons for not contributing are ranked as follows: concern over misappropriation of funds; lack of transparency in how the funds will be used; having been deceived by fraudulent solicitations in the past; economic hardship; excessively frequent requests for donations from one's alma mater; insufficient information regarding the purpose of the fund drive; and poor timing. All of these reasons received high scores, indicating that schools need to consider them carefully when planning their fundraising campaigns.

Although we tried to examine how alumni attitudes towards reasons for not donating might differ in accordance with alumni background, we found that alumni from different backgrounds are not significantly different with regards to their reasons for not giving. This may be due to the fact that nearly all respondents strongly agreed that almost all of the factors listed above would discourage them from making a donation.

### **5. Conclusions and Implications**

Due to a chronic shortage of funding, universities in Taiwan have become increasingly dependent on fundraising to supplement their budgetary shortfalls, with alumni constituting the largest group of donors. In light of the lack of scholarly research on the subject, this study was carried out with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the behavior and attitudes of alumni with respect to donations to their alma mater.

This research set out to examine the assumption that university of education alumni, due to their stable but not very high salaries, are less inclined to make donations than their counterparts who have graduated from other types of universities. The research results produced mixed evidence, some of which support this assumption, and some which contradict it. We found that university of education alumni donate much more frequently than is commonly believed, but the great majority of their donations are quite small.

The results further demonstrate that while university of education alumni do indeed make many donations—about half of the respondents donated to some type of institution—only 3.5% of the amount they donate goes to their alma mater. Hence, universities of education need to launch more effective fundraising campaigns, instead of complacently accepting the common sentiment that “university of education alumni don’t donate.” Moreover, since most of the donations to educational institutions are indeed small amounts, universities of education should start by recognizing the untapped potential of donations from their alumni who have been ignored in the past, and then adopt a policy of “any amount is appreciated” to make the most of the donating patterns of their alumni.

The results indicate that the main motivations for alumni giving are to express gratitude and appreciation to one’s alma mater, and to cultivate talent. The results also show that alumni are most inclined to make donations to fundraising campaigns aimed at assisting disadvantaged students or providing scholarships and fellowships. All of this indicates that the most successful university fundraising campaigns are those which focus on increasing the sense of identification alumni have with their alma mater by explicitly emphasizing that the purpose is to improve academic performance and benefit students in some specific way.

Our analysis of the factors which deter alumni from making donations shows that alumni are least inclined to make contributions when they have concerns that their donation might not be used in an efficient manner, and when there is a lack of transparency. It was also discovered that alumni are most receptive to fundraising appeals in which such prominent people as the school’s president or the head of the alumni association play a leading role. One reason for this is because alumni gain a certain degree of prestige by donating in response to an appeal by the school president or the head of the alumni association. Another reason is that an appeal made by such a reputable person is taken by donors as a guarantee that their contribution will not be misused. All of this indicates that donors give great importance to the efficient use of donations to improve the quality of education. Thus, when planning and conducting fundraising campaigns, it is very important for schools to use various means to assure potential donors that their contributions will be used in an efficient manner. Such measures include appointing a spokesperson with a strong reputation in the community, increasing transparency with regards to the use of proceeds, and informing donors about the results of their donations in a timely manner.

Finally, the results of the correspondence analyses indicate that different types of fundraising strategies have dramatically different effects on different alumni groupings. Therefore, knowing which strategy is more appealing to which group of alumni, and the use of several different fundraising programs instead of only one unified program, can enhance fundraising results.

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Table 1. ANOVA of criteria and *t* test on donation amount

		Content <i>N</i> = 292			
Criteria		Number	Mean	<i>t</i> or <i>F</i>	<i>t</i> or Scheffe
Gender	(1) Female	204	11.47	23.402*	(2) > (1)
	(2) Male	88	28.36		
Age	(1) 30 or below	86	5.44	7.39***	(3) > (1) (4) > (1), (2)
	(2) 31–40	134	11.64		
	(3) 41–50	51	33.65		
	(4) 51 or above	21	52.00		

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2. Correspondence analysis of age and motivation

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence	
					Accounted For	Cumulative	SD	Corr. 2
1	.298	.089			.611	.611	.051	.092
2	.237	.056			.385	.995	.052	
Total		.145	50.5	.001	.995	.995		

Table 3. Correspondence analysis of age and campaign theme

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence	
					Accounted For	Cumulative	SD	Corr. 2
1	.238	.057			.533	.654	.054	.052
2	.209	.044			.413	.946	.055	
Total		.106	34.273	.012	.946	.946		

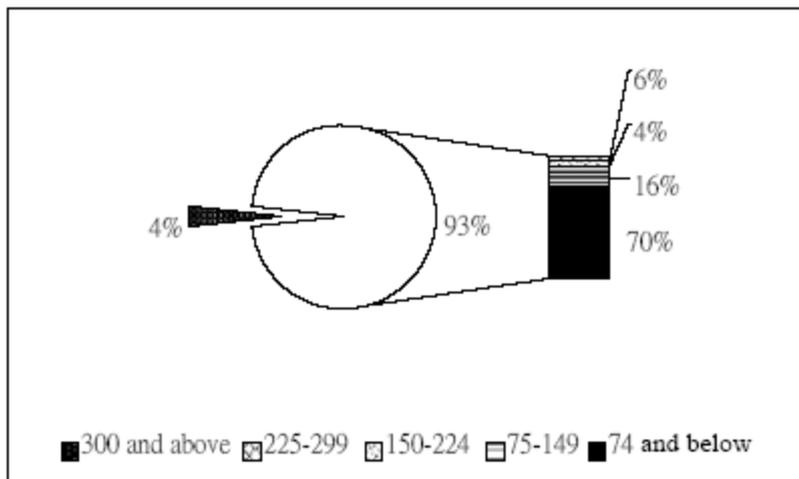


Figure 1. Individual donation amounts given by university of education alumni to any organization (USD)

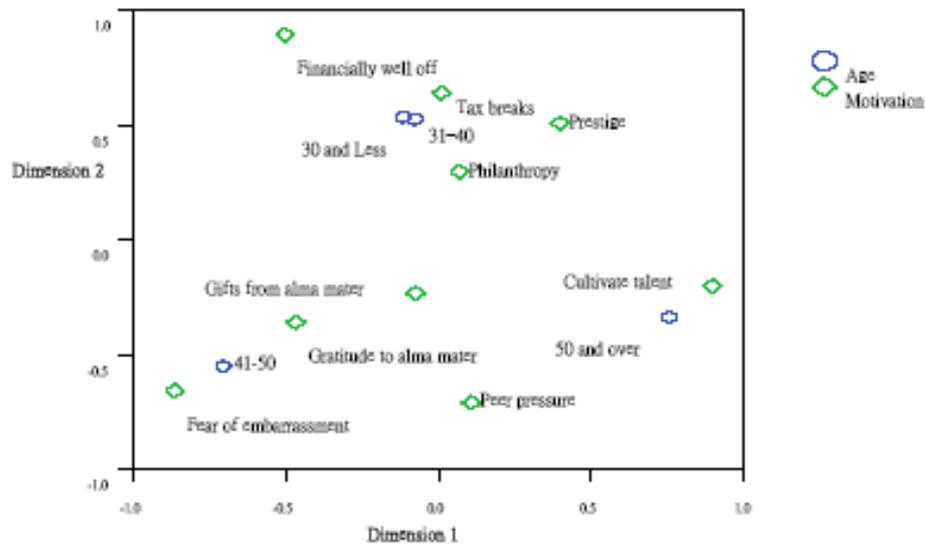


Figure 2. Perceptual map of age and motivation

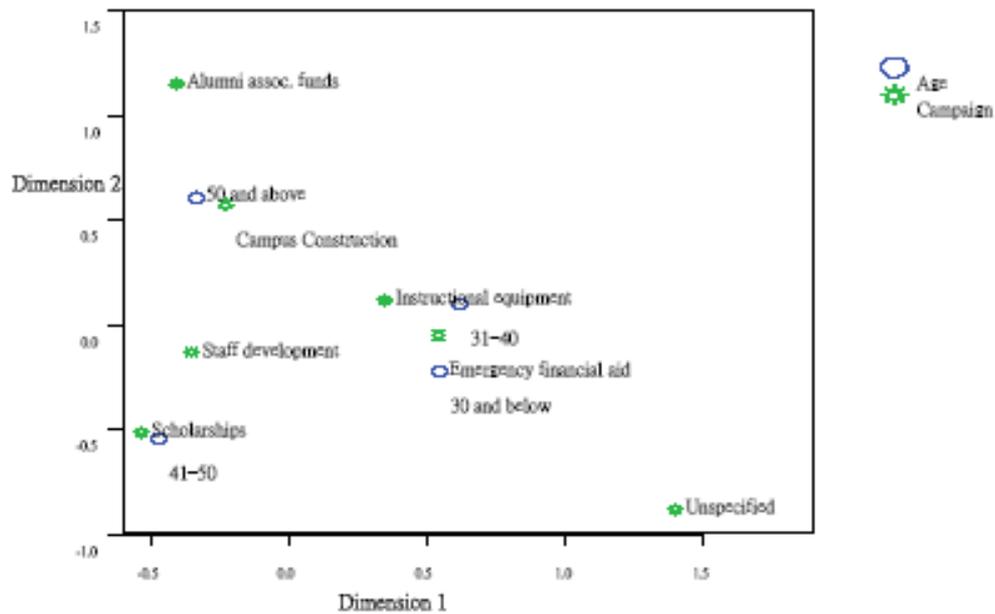


Figure 3. Perceptual map of age and campaign theme