



# Research Brief



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## Engaging Young Alumni in Higher Education Philanthropy: A Case Study of the Millennial Generation Participation in Homecoming Events at Indiana University, Bloomington

Roy Y. Chan  
[rychan@indiana.edu](mailto:rychan@indiana.edu)

### Introduction

Recent research suggests that among Millennial alumni (defined as age 22 to 35) giving rates to higher education have steadily declined (Eduventures, 2014). In addition, past studies claim that Millennials are far less likely than previous generations to give back and participate in alumni events in higher education (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2015).

To address this growing concern, this research brief utilizes survey data of approximately 628 alumni from Indiana University, Bloomington (IUB) to understand how often IUB alums/alumnus return to campus for alumni activities. More specifically, this study explored 155 Millennials from the “2015 Alumni Returning to Campus Survey” in partnership between the Indiana University Alumni Association’s (IUAA) and Indiana University Foundation (IUF) to understand the attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of alumni participation and motivation at IUB.

While numerous past studies have explored the levels of alumni engagement in social alumni groups (Hunter, Jones, & Boger, 1999) or reading alumni publications (Werts & Ronca, 2009), limited research has investigated the involvement trends of alumni attending university campus wide alumni events (Netzer, Latin, & Srinivasan, 2008). Furthermore, no research has explored

Millennials alumni participation for attending and/or engaging in Homecoming events.

As university alumni participation rates among the Millennial generation continues to decline, this research brief will assist institutional advancement offices, university foundations and IR professionals to better understand the best approaches to cultivate interest and involvement with the younger generation. The ultimate goal of this research brief is to help university fundraisers and IR professionals lay the groundwork for alumni involvement and to increase Millennial alumni engagement levels in alumni association activities both philanthropically and socially.

### Research Questions

- 1) What do alumni, specifically the Millennial generation (born 1980-2000), report about their engagement in Homecoming activities as alumni at Indiana University, Bloomington?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between demographic factors (age, gender, geographic location) and reported engagement in Homecoming activities among the Millennial generation at Indiana University, Bloomington?

## Literature Review

In the last 10 years, expectations about the role of philanthropy and fundraising in higher education have increased. Notably, these expectations are based on assumptions and actual behavior that philanthropic organizations and private donors can enhance the capacity and performance of postsecondary institutions (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011). Today, no institutions of higher education have survived without some form of fundraising or gifts for the institution (Bernstein, 2013). Every public and private institution is grappling with a philanthropic agenda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As financial challenges related to increased tuition costs and scarce public resources for direct funding and student financial aid increase, colleges and universities have grown much more dependent on the increased philanthropic involvements of the wealthy to fund academic and professional programs, to raise college participation and completion rates, and to build state-of-the-art facilities for high quality teaching and research in higher education (Chan, 2016).

During the 2014 fiscal year, donors gave more than \$37.45 billion to U.S. colleges and universities, the most ever raised in a one-year period and nearly a 10 percent increase since 2012 (Voluntary Support of Education (VSE), 2015). The continued increase in philanthropic activity is likely due to many internal and external factors such as, more students and alumni reporting greater satisfaction with their college experience; institutional maturity; a strong national ranking; an increased percentage of tenured professors; an increased percentage of endowments; and regional location (Johnson Grossnickle and Associates, 2013). Despite the fact that more alumni are giving back to colleges and universities at higher rates since the Great

Recession in 2009, new research has found that Millennial alumni giving rates have steadily declined (*The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 2015). In addition, past studies have suggested that the Millennial generation today are far less likely than previous generations to give back to their alma mater institution as a result to rising student debt and the value of a college degree (Eduventures, 2014).

For instance, according to the most recent “2014 Alumni Pulse” survey by Eduventures, which combines survey data with giving records for over 70,000 alumni, they found that the U.S. national alumni participation and involvement rate for undergraduate alumni is less than 10 percent, five percent lower than a decade ago. In a similar study, the “2015 Millennial Alumni Report” survey conducted in partnership with Achieve and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* found that 75 percent of Millennial alumni are more likely to donate to their favorite charity before donating to their alma mater, and that 42 percent of Millennial alumni who haven’t donated to their alma mater never intend to give at all. These findings are a source of concern for fundraising professionals (board of trustees, the president, development officers) and student affairs professionals, especially during the time when Millennial alumni are expecting more from their alma mater institution than previous generations. Consequently, new research is needed to address the growing opportunities and challenges to engage younger alumni in higher education philanthropy (Chan, 2014).

## Demographics

The following section reviews the demographics from the “IUAA 2015 *Returning to Campus Survey*” conducted between June 2015 and August 2015 at Indiana University, Bloomington, with

special attention to the affinity, belonging and engagement of young, diverse alumni whose age fall between 18 and 35. More specifically, this research brief utilizes survey data of 155 IU Millennials to understand whether philanthropic motivation differs by age and gender. Chart I illustrates the number of respondents from the IUAA survey dataset according to the respondents age group and sex.

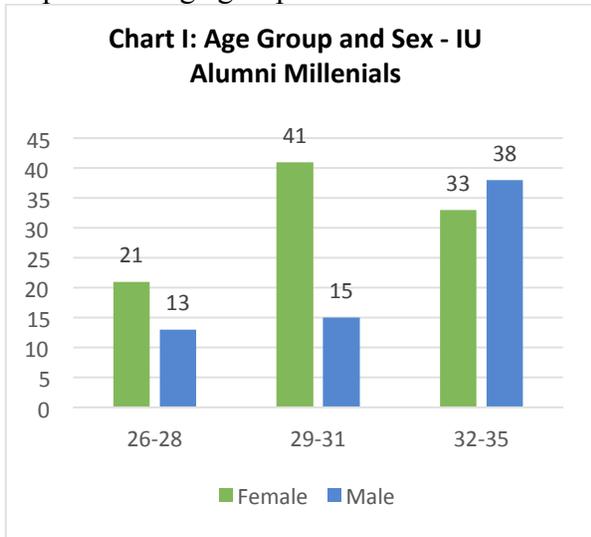


Chart I: Age Group and Sex – IU Alumni Millennials.

As shown in Chart I, there were more females than males who completed the “IUAA 2015 *Returning to Campus Survey*” for the age group 26-28 and 29-31. However, for the age group 32-35, there were slightly more males than females. The highest number of respondents in the survey was Age 30, with 24 participants and 18 females, while the lowest number of respondents was Age 26 and 27, both receiving 11 respondents.

In terms of geographical location, a large proportion of IU Millennial alumni currently reside outside the state of Indiana, with 57 percent living out of state and 43 percent living in state as shown in Chart II.

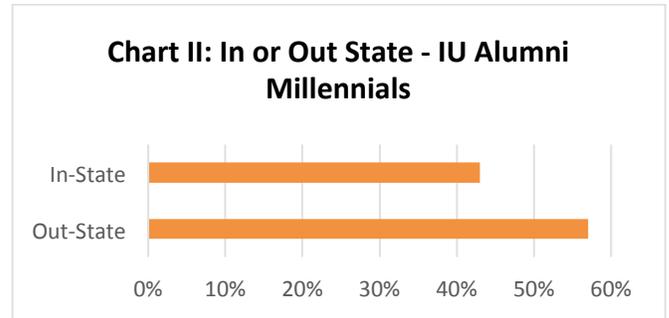


Chart II: In or Out State – IU Alumni Millennials.

The high percentage of IU Millennials alumni living outside the state of Indiana is important to note in this brief because all events pertaining to Homecoming Weekend are held on the Bloomington campus and thus, would require IU Millennials alumni to travel to Indiana in order to attend the event. Because a large number IU Millennials alumni live outside the state of Indiana, the findings of this research brief should be taken with caution when making any claims about the Millennial generation in the United States.

## Results

The following section are the results of the 155 IU Millennials from the “IUAA 2015 *Returning to Campus Survey*.”

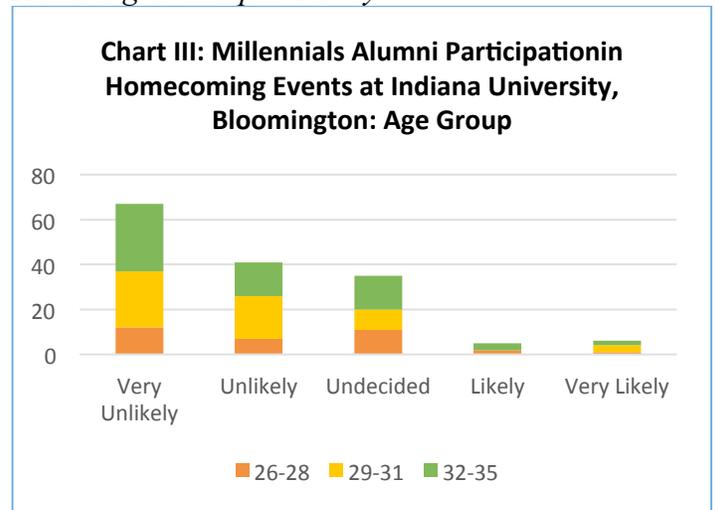


Chart III: Millennials alumni participation in Homecoming events at Indiana University, Bloomington: Age Group.

As shown in Chart III, a large number of IU Millennials alumni are ‘Very Unlikely’ to attend IU Homecoming Weekend on October 2015. More specifically, more than 60 IU Millennial alumni are ‘Very Unlikely’ to attend IU Homecoming Weekend with the vast majority in the age group 32-35. In addition to a lack of alumni participation, a large number of Millennials whose age fell between 29 and 31 are either ‘Very Unlikely’ or ‘Unlikely’ to attend IU Homecoming weekend.

When comparing across gender, this study found that a large number of IU Millennial females are ‘Very Unlikely’ or ‘Unlikely’ to attend IU Homecoming Events than males as shown in Chart IV.

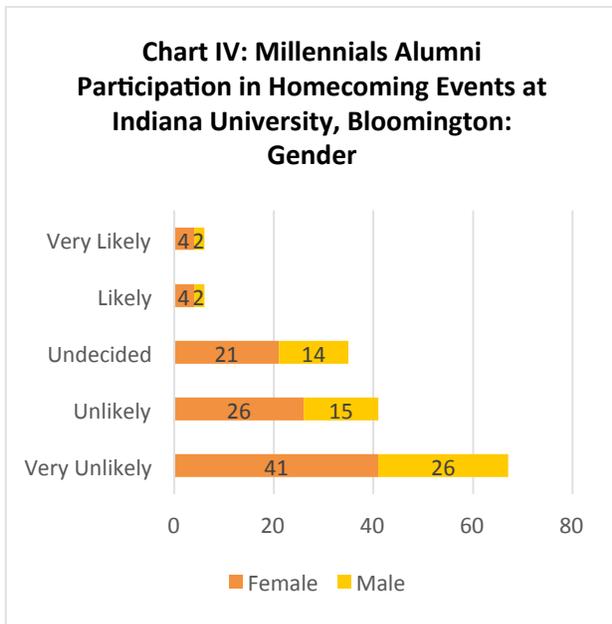


Chart IV: Millennials alumni participation in Homecoming events at Indiana University, Bloomington: Gender.

More specifically, a large proportion of IU Millennials alumni are ‘Very Unlikely’ to attend IU Homecoming Weekend, with 41 females and 26 males respectively. This finding is quite interesting to note, knowing that past research have indicated that women across all ages are more likely to be engaged

with alumni association events than men (Drezner & Huehls, 2014).

When analyzing the number of times IU Millennials alumni visited the Indiana University, Bloomington campus, a large number of them did not visit the IU campus in the past 12 months.

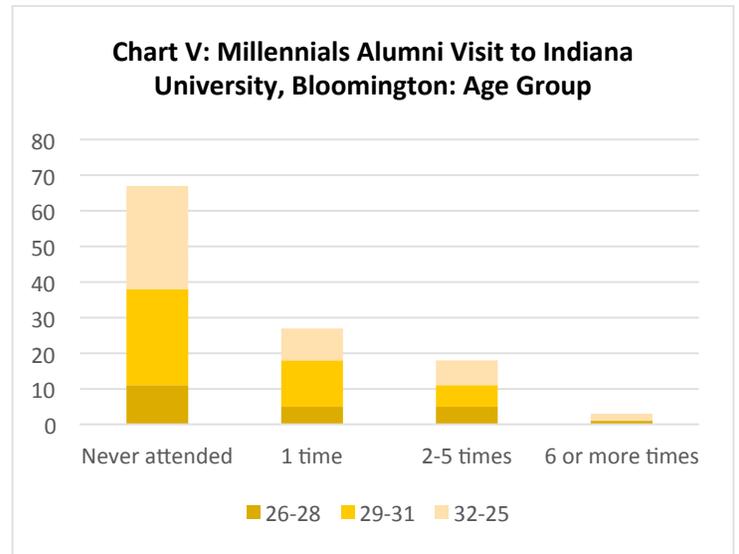


Chart V: Millennials alumni visit to Indiana University, Bloomington: Age Group.

As shown in Chart V, more than 60 IU Millennials alumni did not make a visit to their alma mater institution in the past 12 months, with a large number within the age group 32-25. This finding may suggest that Millennials affinity, belonging, and engagement to Indiana University is either weak or unclear because many IU Millennials reside outside the state of Indiana as discussed in Chart II.

Finally, when analyzing IU Millennials participation in Homecoming events between 2002 and 2014, this study found that a large number of Millennials have ‘Never Attended’ any IU Homecoming events.

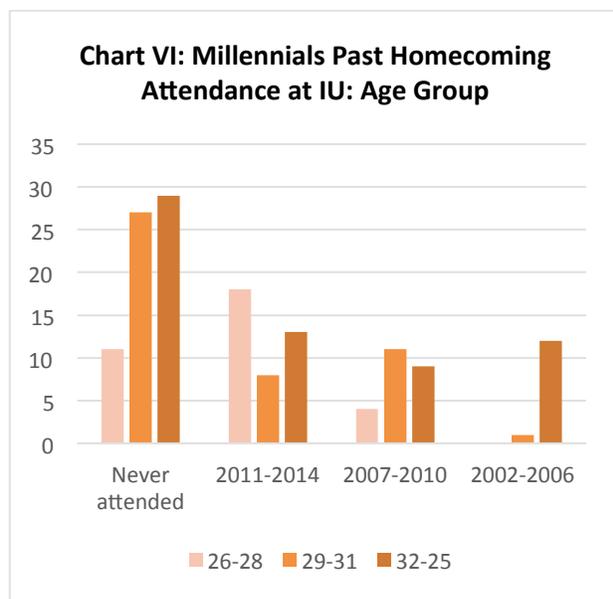


Chart VI: IU Millennials Alumni past Homecoming Attendance: Age Group.

As shown in Chart VI, a large number of IU Millennials alumni have ‘Never Attended’ an IU Homecoming event, with more than 25 each for both age group 29-31 and 32-35. The overwhelming number of Millennials who have never attended an IU Homecoming event may suggest that IU Millennials are either disinterested in Homecoming alumni events or uninterested to be involved with their alma mater institution.

## Conclusion

This study found that alumni, specifically the Millennial generation (born 1980-2000), are very unlikely to attend Homecoming Weekend at Indiana University, Bloomington. More specifically, this study found that a large number of IU Millennial alumni are neither involved nor motivated to engage with their alma mater institution regardless of age, gender, or geographical location. This finding serves as a major source of concern for development officers, student affairs practitioners and IR professionals, especially since numerous

past research have linked student engagement and student experience with alumni involvement and alumni giving in higher education (Morgan, 2014; Werts & Ronca, 2009). Because most IU Millennials alumni are not engaged with their alma mater institution, campus leaders and senior officials may need to reassess and reevaluate some of its current courses, programs and services to ensure that all undergraduate students have a fulfilling and rewarding experience during their years at Indiana University, Bloomington. Focusing on students who are involved in specific undergraduate activities, such as intramurals, fraternity/sorority, may prove to be helpful in improving Millennials future involvement and motivation to alumni events. By focusing on undergraduate activities, development officers and alumni associations can remind their alumni of their positive experience at Indiana University, of which may lead alumni to volunteer for the institution, attend alumni events, or donate financially to their alma mater.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Roy Y. Chan is a Ph.D. candidate in Education Policy Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. Roy holds a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Higher Education Administration from Boston College and a Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Comparative Higher Education from The University of Hong Kong. His research interest focuses on the economic and non-economic benefits of a college degree, the globalization and internationalization of higher education, and the role of philanthropy and fundraising in shaping U.S. higher education. Roy is co-author of the book *Higher Education: A Worldwide Inventory of Research Centers, Academic Programs, and Journals and Publications*, 2014 and is the co-editor of the book *Exploring the Future of Accessibility in Higher Education*, 2017. Roy can be reached for comments or questions at [rychan@indiana.edu](mailto:rychan@indiana.edu).