

**How can Professional Membership Associations Provide  
Meaningful Value for their Members?:  
Creating Models of Affiliation and Engagement**

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## **Abstract**

What do individual association members think about their association membership? What do they value and what do they want to see associations provide in the future? This case study uses face-to-face interviews and focus groups with 12 international Ph.D. students enrolled in a Public Administration and Management program at a major university in Texas to provide answers to these questions. The research offers an understanding of how people from diverse cultures view professional associations. The Ph.D. students were also asked about the importance of their association as a means for building ties and making connections with others, and about volunteering. We do not attempt to generalize our findings to other students or association members but case study research may yield information useful for theory building. We hope that our inquiry will be helpful for associations as they seek to create innovative models of engagement for members in an increasingly globalized world.

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## **Introduction**

Professional membership associations offer members value through the pursuit of collective interests and the acquisition of selective benefits. Collective interests include innovations and advancements in the profession, and public policies that can open new markets. Collective interests are identified in formal mission statements, strategic plans and other association documents. Selective benefits are offered to members only and include professional information, training, and advancement opportunities. Discounts on goods and services such as insurance, magazines, car rentals, etc., are also selective benefits. Although selective benefits may help to attract potential members they are useful only if they are valued. For retaining members, selective benefits must continue to be valued. Even then, their usefulness can be challenged if other groups or businesses offer similar benefits at a discounted price. What it takes to encourage members to join, remain, and even more daunting, be active in an association is unclear. This lack of clarity is not helpful to membership associations for creating strategies useful for attracting, engaging or retaining members.

Research shows that retention in a membership association may be positively related to the strength of organizational social capital (Bhattacharya, 1998). The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) dataset “Decision to Volunteer” also shows that the intent to remain is higher when people feel attached to, and engaged with, their associations (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Two types of social capital include bonding and bridging capital (Leonard & Onyx, 2003). Bonding social capital occurs within a close group of individuals who share common values, whether in informal groups or among those in a formal organization (Leonard & Onyx, 2003). Bridging social capital is a type of connection that links members of different groups or organizations (Wuthnow, 1998).

Social capital may be weak or strong, but organizational action is required to develop or strengthen it. We suspect that associations will be more likely to attract and hold members when there are high levels of social capital present. But there are challenges in creating social capital as members are often geographically dispersed and linked by technology rather than face-to-face interactions. Our research explores the value that 12 international Ph.D. students place on the collective and selective benefits offered by their membership associations. Our research also considers the social capital that is being created, or could be created by associations based on the reports of our respondents. As volunteering has been shown to increase social capital in communities and among individuals, we also examine this in our research.

## **Theoretical framework**

Our study uses grounded theory which is a social science approach whereby theory is developed from data that is collected and analyzed. Theory is developed by observing patterns in the data and making connections among these. When dealing with novel or understudied topics, a grounded theory approach can reveal more than previous theory might, especially when qualitative, ethnographic methods are used (Ellis, 1993, Creswell, 2012).

In our analysis section, we also refer to the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992). This instrument has been used in research across many academic fields and in interdisciplinary studies. The VFI classifies human motivations across six categories: values (to express or act on important values like humanitarianism), understanding (to learn more about the world or to exercise skills), social (to strengthen relationships), career (to gain job related experience), protective (to reduce negative feelings or to address personal problems), and enhancement (to grow and develop psychologically) (Clary, et al., 1992, 339). The tool is useful

for data analysis and results in a profile that provides an understanding what motivates people to volunteer.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This study uses a purposive sample of 12 international Ph.D. students pursuing a doctorate degree in public administration and management. The research cohort includes students enrolled in a single department of public administration at a public university in Texas. Participating students hailed from ten countries including China, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Our sample includes young professionals in the early stages of their careers. The selection of participants was based on their foreign status, meaning that all interviewees came from countries other than the United States.

Previous research on associations shows that young people tend to value the networking, information sharing, and career development opportunities offered by their associations, but these studies have been conducted primarily with members from the U.S. (Omoto, Snyder, & Martino 2000; Handy et al. 2010; Gage & Thapa 2012). While there is no reason to assume that the interests of international students will necessarily be different, our sample was selected to determine if cultural variations emerge. This research used qualitative research methods for primary data collection. These collection techniques included semi-structured face-to-face interviews, follow-up focus groups, and written individual biographies submitted by respondents.

Emails for participants were obtained from the Ph.D. program's student directory which includes contact information made publicly available with the student's consent. Email invitations to participate in the study and cover letters explaining its purpose were used to recruit and to gain the respondents' informed consent. To help ensure confidentiality, our interviews do

not contain the names of students. The study design was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board prior to engaging in any recruitment or other primary data collection methods.

### **Data collection: Interview instrument**

The authors developed a 52-question in-depth semi-structured interview survey consisting almost exclusively of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) (Barriball & While, 1994). In one-hour face-to-face interviews we explored students' attitudes, values, beliefs and motives for joining and/or staying with a professional association. The interviews were conducted by the Ph.D. student co-investigator in August and September of 2013. Each interview lasted about an hour and was audio recorded for transcribing purposes. The interviews included demographic questions about participants' gender, age, and country of origin. They were then asked to provide information about their cultural and family background and why they were pursuing a professional career. Questions were also asked to learn if they had joined a professional association in their home country or in the United States. We also asked participants to discuss the value they received from their associations and to offer advice on how member benefits might be improved. Interviews concluded with a set of questions about volunteering and whether the student had volunteered for their professional association.

All participants received an incentive (an Amazon online store gift card), for participating in an interview. Informed consent for all participants was obtained in accordance with ethical guidelines for social science research.



## **Data Collection: Focus groups**

Two focus groups were held in October 2013 to gather information about the roles of associations in their home country, and value of professional associations in helping members succeed in their careers. Students received an incentive (a Target store gift card), for participating in a focus group. Informed consent for all participants was obtained in accordance with ethical guidelines for social science research. (Focus group questions are in Appendix B).

## **Data Collection: Biographies of participants**

Each of the 12 participants was asked to provide a short biographical statement that provided information about where they were raised (i.e., a large urban environment, a small farming community), how long they resided there, and some background about their experiences in their country of origin as it related to their choice of a career. They also provided information about family and other influences (i.e., cultural expectations, neighbors, religion), that were important to them on their career paths. We also asked them to identify to what extent, if any, professional or trade associations had had an influence on their career choices.

Ten of the 12 Ph.D. students who participated in interviews also participated by providing a biographical statement (a Target store gift card was offered as an incentive). Informed consent for all participants was obtained in accordance with ethical guidelines for social science research.

## **Secondary data**

The secondary data used in this project is taken from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) dataset the “Decision to Volunteer” (2007) available by request

for academic and research purposes only. Other information is derived from relevant academic and professional literature.

## **Organization of the paper**

In the following section we provide an overview of the demographic backgrounds of our study sample and a presentation of our participants' biographical statements. The biographies are used to help orient the reader to the participants and to the educational and professional journey of each. Following the biographies, we present our findings from interviews and focus groups. An analysis of our findings is then offered and discussed with regard to current and potential theoretical constructs. We hope that this analysis will prove useful for professional associations as they seek to create models of engagement that are useful for attracting, retaining and engaging members across the globe.

## **Findings**

### **Demographics**

The descriptive summary of respondents' countries of origin, gender, age, parents' education and parents' occupational status are presented in Table 1. Among the 12 Ph.D. respondents are three females and nine males all between the ages of 28 and 38 (average age is 32). Nine of the students lived in their country of origin and came to the United States to obtain a professional degree. Three respondents were born outside of the U.S. but have spent a number of years here beginning with middle school or high school.

Nine students were raised in a two-parent (mother and father) household. In the three other cases, the primary caretakers were grandparents, a mother and grandparents, or a sister and brother-in-law. All of the male family members were in a profession or ran a small business, and

**Table 1. Demographics of participants and family background**

	<b>Country</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>GNI</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Two-parent household</b>	<b>Father prof/career</b>	<b>Mother prof/career</b>	<b>Father education</b>	<b>Mother education</b>
1	Ghana	M	38	Lower/Mid	SSA	Yes	Public servant	Self-employed homemaker	High school	No school
2	China	M	30	Upper/Mid	EA&P	No (mother and grandparents)	--	Statistician	--	College certificate
3	Taiwan	M	32	Upper/Mid	EA&P	Yes	SBO	Housewife	High school	High school
4	South Korea	M	32	High	EA&P	Yes	Public official	Housewife	High school	Middle school
5	Kenya	F	35	Low	SSA	Yes	Teacher	Teacher	College	College
6	Nepal	F	30	Low	South Asia	Yes	SBO	Housewife	University diploma	Intermediate school level
7	Thailand	M	34	Upper/Mid	EA&P	Yes (with grandparents)	SBO	SBO	Primary school	Primary school
8	South Korea	M	32	High	EA&P	Yes	Pastor	Pharmacist	Master's degree	Bachelor's
9	Kenya	M	28	Low	SSA	Yes	Pastor/Professor	Nurse	PhD	Associate's degree
10	Mexico	M	28	Upper/Mid	LA&C	Yes	Construction site manager	Housewife	Elementary school	Middle school and some high school
11	The Gambia	F	34	Low	SSA	No (sister's family)	--	SBO	--	High school
12	Saudi Arabia	M	31	High	--	Yes	University administration	Housewife	Master's degree	High school

GNI – Gross National Income (World Bank, 2011): Low, \*1,025 or less. Lower/Mid, \*1,026-4,035. Upper/Mid, \*4,036-12,475. High, \*12,476 or more

Region: SSA - Sub-Saharan Africa; EA&P - East Asian and Pacific; LA&C - Latin America and the Caribbean

SBO – Small business owner

three-quarters held a college or at least a high school equivalent degree. For females, the most frequent occupation identified was homemaker (6 of 12), followed by two running a small business and four in a professional occupation. For all female caregivers, the educational background was typically less than a college degree (8 of 12) and in one case, the woman had received no formal education. Family professions included education, construction, healthcare, theology, or business (self-employed).

In interview question 13, participants were asked why they were pursuing a Ph.D. degree. A variety of responses included (from Ghana), “it was a personal goal,” while the student from China noted that his family members all had research backgrounds,” and the student from Taiwan noted that there was “a lack of outside input in his country,” “very few have studied abroad”, and that he “wanted to share knowledge learned in the U.S. with others in his country.”

Other responses included (from South Korea), “to be a provider for his family and country,” and because he, “is interested in emergency management and want to educate the public about it.” A student from Kenya noted that he is “seeking to get job skills” and to enhance his social position. The participant from Nepal is interested in protecting life and saving property as “there is high seismic activity in Nepal.” From Thailand, “a job position is promised,” and he is therefore tied by contract to come back with the degree. To stay competitive on the market is the driving force, however. “There is a lot of workforce being relocated from Singapore to Thailand and Malaysia. I want to stay competitive.”

For another South Korean student, the goal of the Ph.D. is “to get the job I want which is a professor and researcher.” A Kenyan noted that her family urged her to get the degree but “I also saw the value and wanted to pursue this for career goals.” For the student from The Gambia

and from Mexico, each was “interested in more knowledge” and shared a love for teaching. Our respondent from Saudi Arabia noted “it was something I have always wanted to do.”

In sum, our respondents are motivated by job and career goals, personal goals and family security, and contributions to the larger community in their home countries.

## **Findings: Biographies**

We asked each participant to provide a short 1-2 page biography that included information about where they grew up (i.e., a large urban environment, a small farming community), how long they resided there, and background on education or personal experiences in their country of origin as it related to their choice of a career. Information such as the type of industries in their region, whether there was a university, etc., was also sought. We asked them to comment on cultural expectations, neighbors, religion, or other factors that may have been important in selecting a career path. Finally, participants were asked to discuss what they knew about professional or trade associations. Of the 12 students who agreed to an interview, ten also chose to provide a biography. Some minor editing has been performed, but in all other respects, the stories of our participants are in their own words. Each participant is identified by a number, their country of origin, and by gender (M-male, or F-female).

### **Participant 1: China (M)**

I was born and grew up in the City of Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi Province, China. The total population of Taiyuan was 4.235 million in 2011, making it the largest city in the province. By comparison, the capital city, Beijing, has a population of 20.69 million. Taiyuan was established approximately 2,500 years ago as the capital city of an ancient state, yet the current economy relies on coal mines and the steel industry. Nationally, Taiyuan is understood as having an industrial base with a provincial political/economic center.

I lived in Taiyuan 18 years before going attending a prestigious college in China. My childhood was critically important in my selection of career. Both my grandfather and my grandmother have been university professors, one majoring in mathematics, and the other is now a senior statistician in the provincial government. These influences offered me an impression of research related jobs and interests in government functions.

Aside from family background, a series of personal experiences also motivates me to become an academician in the field of public administration. A bachelor's degree in urban and regional planning and a job in an architectural design company enhanced my confidence and interests. After a three-year working experience in a routine job in a hierarchical organization with a fixed daily schedule and strict supervision, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the U.S to help with what I perceived to be administrative dysfunctions in the public sector.

My culture also contributed to my career selection. Typical Chinese families value their children's education much more than other merits. Given the fact that doctoral programs are a part of the education sequence, most Chinese parents believe that a "successful" student should be able to get a doctoral degree. This concern is also partially endorsed by the society by giving scholars a higher social status and more secure jobs. The professional associations, however, had no influence on me in selecting my career.

### **Participant 2: Liberia/The Gambia (F)**

I was born in Liberia, a country in West Africa. At age eight, I moved to The Gambia, my father's country of birth in the middle of a civil war. The Gambia is a former British colony with a population of 1.8 million. When I left Liberia I was in the third grade, but in The Gambia students must begin again in first grade so at age eight in The Gambia I began my educational

journey. The only good thing I saw at this time in my young life was that classes were in English.

Unlike many African countries blessed with natural resources, The Gambia has none and agriculture (peanut growing), and tourism are the main industries. Most rural families are sustenance farmers. I lived in Bakau, a sleepy little seaside town, where fishing was the main occupation. Politically, this little town was important in shaping my civic life. The whole town shows up for any election and religion also plays a very important role in people's lives.

In primary school (grade six) we sit for an exam called the common entrance. This exam is taken by all six graders in the country on the same day. The students with the top grades are moved into the best three high schools; an all girls, all boys, and a mixed gender high school. The rest are moved into other high schools and secondary schools. Based on my grades, I ended up in The Gambia High School, the oldest and most prestigious high school. The separating and weeding continues until one graduates from high school. In the ninth grade, students, together with parents and teachers, choose a track [science, commerce or liberal arts], and follow that based on future goals. Considering the fact that the illiteracy rate [among parents] is very high, [in essence] students and teachers are left with selecting the track. Students are then taught in those areas of specialization with math and English being core subjects that everyone takes. I lived in The Gambia until I graduated high school. During my stay in The Gambia there was no university. There were training institutes (secretarial, banking, and so forth), and correspondence schools. Those with money and family willing to pay went abroad for university.

My influences were shaped [first] by the education system. I choose the liberal arts track and was very much engaged within the community with volunteering and raising awareness on

mental health issues. An awareness of mental health came when at the end of ninth grade we had a visiting teacher from the U.S. She spoke about mental health, and I realized that it was a topic that was not spoken of in front of young people. She influenced my career choice, but the schools also played a role by nudging me in the liberal arts direction. Based on my early involvement with helping out in the community, neighbors, family friends, and my teachers wanted me to pursue law and be a voice for those within the community. I could never picture myself in that role. The greatest influence in my career choice was my mother. Shortly after moving to The Gambia, my father passed away leaving my mother to raise ten children. I was the youngest. My mother could barely read, yet she fought to ensure that all of her children were educated.

As far as associations are concerned, they were neither in the high school nor any other school I attended. For example, “The Bankers Association” did not speak to the commerce students, and “The Gambia Bar Association” did not speak to any of us during my time there. It makes me wonder how many of the liberal arts students would have chosen differently had associations come and presented on what their organizations do, or what the associations are all about. It was not until I left The Gambia that I found out that there were some associations present.

### **Participant 3: Kenya (F)**

I am originally from Kenya and the fourth child of a family of six children, and a proud mother of a 14 year old son. I grew up in a small farming community with a population of 3,000 people. My parents had been transferred to this community to teach at an elementary and middle school and I lived there for 12 years before moving to a boarding, primary (middle) school, about 50 miles away. I then attended a boarding high school 200 miles from my parents. Most schools



in our country have a boarding setup where children stay away from parents for a period of four months and they are picked up after the semester is over. Parents are only allowed to visit their children once a month and the visiting times are restricted. There were many local churches and I grew up in a catholic church before I switched to a Pentecostal church in my early 20s.

In my family's community, there were no local industries besides coffee and tea factories where farmers delivered their produce. From the age of 13, I learned to be independent and learned most things from my teachers and school mates in boarding school. During the holidays I would sometimes visit my uncles and aunties who were living in the urban areas like Nairobi city but this would only happen if I had performed well in school during the semester and would earn myself an experience of city life. After high school I attended one of the Public Universities in Kenya.

My parents were elementary teachers and my father was involved as a volunteer with church activities after work. My mother volunteered as a chairlady of a community association involved in micro-financing support for women in poverty. This membership organization was where women contributed funds monthly and loaned to low income women in the community who would pay back with some interest. The results for such associations were tremendous since most of the women used the cash to start up small businesses and educate their children. As teachers, my parents were also in a teachers' professional association where they contributed funds monthly and as a result they became proud owners of an extra house that they bought through the association since it was investing in the housing market. This house brings them monthly income from rent.

My mother inspired me a lot and I carried this experience to the University that I attended. I was involved in student associations and in community activities such as educating families that were affected by or infected with HIV and AIDS. The patrons of the associations (faculty mentors) taught me a lot of skills such as communications, how to facilitate groups, etc. During University summer breaks I would get an opportunity to volunteer at an international nonprofit organization that was based near our rural area, Africa Medical and Research Foundation, (AMREF). Here, I became acutely aware of the difference between “doing something for people” and helping them to achieve something on their own.

Immediately after my undergraduate studies I was able to secure a job as an assistant human resource manager at a multi-international alcohol brewing private company (East Africa Breweries Limited- EABL) in Nairobi. It is through this organization that I learned about working with individuals from different career backgrounds and about professional associations. The company had its own private foundation where it was involved with education scholarships and community initiative projects such as clean water, the environment, life skills, and special projects that come up after a disaster.

My work and volunteer experiences have provided me with many opportunities to understand the life experiences of other people. While I have enjoyed University life and work, many of the most influential moments of my career have come from direct interactions with the people I served while volunteering at AMREF and working at EABL. These are examples of experiences held by a majority of professionals in Kenya. I wasn't involved in any professional association while in Kenya, but it is important that professional associations be involved in community work that will bring economic change.

#### **Participant 4: Mexico (M)**

I was born in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, which is a border city with Texas. Currently, the city has a population of over 600,000 people. At the age of six, my parents decided to immigrate to the United States in pursuit of better opportunities. The move was not very far and we settled in a town called Pharr, Texas, which is about 30 minutes away from Reynosa. In the United States, my parents saw greater opportunities, better jobs and a better education system. In Mexico it is costly to pursue an education as parents have to pay all costs out of pocket for items such as books, meals, and uniforms. In addition, financing options for a college education are almost nonexistent.

I grew up in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) area of South Texas and attended public schools in those cities. PSJA is also an independent school district, with numerous elementary, middle and high schools. I attended schools that were within the City of Pharr until the 9th grade (15 years old) when my family and I moved to San Juan, which is a neighboring city. I, however, remained enrolled in the high school in Pharr—PSJA North HS.

Growing up, I would say that my family fell within the lower middle class. Both of my parents worked arduously to provide for my sister and me. My father worked in construction and my mother ran her own small business from home selling tamales. I saw my parents struggle financially and my parents constantly reminded me that they didn't want the same for my future. They instilled in me the value of pursuing an education and taking advantage of financial aid and scholarships for a college education. I grew up in a conservative Christian home which shaped my values regarding faith, family, and service. For example, as a teenager I participated in several youth events where we helped the needy and attended conferences on youth leadership.

Despite some challenges relating to my socioeconomic background, I never became interested in pursuing a career with promising financial returns. I have always been interested in helping others—particularly those with disadvantaged backgrounds. Because I excelled academically in high school, I received numerous scholarships and admission to multiple colleges and universities. I decided to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and this led to my involvement in nonprofit organizations in San Antonio including a battered women’s shelter.

Shortly after graduation, I began a full-time career in the social service field as a Youth Programs Coordinator for a church ministry and later as a Social Service Worker for the local mental health authority. These social work experiences exposed me to a variety of public organizations. I was intrigued that some organizations thrived under tough economic times and were able to recruit and retain employees. These were led by strong, visionary leaders. On the other hand, some public organizations had low employee morale, and administrators who lacked a mission and vision. These experiences led to my decision to pursue a career as an administrator of social programs. I matriculated in the Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program at the University of Texas – Pan American, but after two years of managing a social program that served over 1,000 children with mental health needs, I felt that I could make a greater contribution to society by pursuing a doctoral degree.

### **Participant 5: Nepal (F)**

I was born and raised in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, in a middle class family. Kathmandu is the largest city in Nepal with a population of more than 700,000. My family emphasized education and building a successful professional career. My father has been an inspiration and encouraged all of his children to study and work hard.

I completed my high school from a girl's convent located in Kathmandu. Since, I was always fascinated by buildings and interiors I joined a government engineering university in the capital to receive a bachelor's degree in architecture. Engineering has always been a prominent career choice among Nepalese as majority of the country is undeveloped. Both my high school and university were renowned schools in Nepal. Contrary to the rural side of Nepal, where people don't have access to higher education, the capital city is flourishing with universities that focus on engineering, medical and business degrees. Societal norms are changing which has provided new opportunities for women and girls. Nonetheless, in rural Nepal, girls are still deprived of education and are not allowed to work outside the home. In the capital, however, this mindset is changing, and women are joining the workforce.

Throughout my undergraduate study, I was involved in student associations and as a volunteer for the city conservation and earthquake awareness program. After the completion of my undergraduate degree, I worked as an architect in a private firm and in Nepal, I was a member of two professional associations – Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) and Nepal Engineers Association (NEA).

In 2008, I moved to Texas and I received a master's degree in city and regional planning from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2010. I decided to continue with my higher education in fall 2011. My motivation to get a Ph.D. degree in public administration and management primarily came from my socio-economic background. In Nepal, emergency management has always been neglected. About ninety percent of Nepal is village, and people are deprived of basic utilities, transportation, and proper housing. The harsh topographical conditions and low economic state of the country exacerbates the loss of life and property in case

of any kind of disaster. I believe that effective government processes and emergency management strategies are the only means that can lower the impact of hazards and disasters for these communities. Almost all professional associations in Nepal are based on professions like engineering, business, medical etc. I believe that professional associations play an important role in building a successful academic career.

### **Participant 6: South Korea (M)**

I was born in a small farming community with only 4, 200 people within the City of Changnyeong, South Korea. I lived there for 15 years, and then moved to the City of Masan, a small-sized metropolitan port area, which is located in the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. My middle and high school were in Masan because Korean rural areas do not have an outstanding educational environment. My parents and relatives expected me to study hard and go to the best university in South Korea and they motivated me to do so. My father has had a positive effect on my choice of a career. When I was young, he was a public officer in local government and he taught me how to work as a public servant.

After finishing high school, I started college life in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. What you study in Seoul puts you on the right track for a career in Korea. I applied to the Department of English Literature, I finished the Korean Military Service (i.e., about 30 months), and studied Public Administration as a double-major. South Korea has a critical need for professionals to cope with social problems and an increasing gap between the rich and poor. Unfortunately, although South Korea has focused on enhancing national economic growth, it has not fostered governance mechanisms or promoted democratic values.

I had an MPA, while I was working as a research assistant in the Presidential Committee of 2006, but I could not suggest ideas and or provide innovative thoughts to the committee. I decided that holding a Ph.D. in the United States might help me to get over a lot of socially-constructed class differences in South Korea that I cannot otherwise get over.

Most Korean scholars have borrowed and applied PA theories into Korean contexts but the level of democratic values perceived by American citizens is different from what Koreans do. I am motivated to build my professional career because I want to help build a stronger democracy. A lot of Korean people only follow the rules of government. They have a right to know about other alternatives that may make our society better. Building a professional career means that I can become influential and promote; “Government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

### **Participant 7: Kenya (M)**

I was born in Kirinyaga, Kenya a small town located in the former Central Province of Kenya. My early childhood was in Nyahururu, Kenya, a town with an urban population of about 36,000. The town is situated around the famous Thompson Falls on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River which drains into the Aberdare Mountain Ranges. As a result of this location, Nyahururu is frequented by tourists and which allowed me to gain exposure to different cultures and peoples from a very early age.

I lived in Nyahururu for the first seven years of my life and my formative years and early education occurred in Nyahururu. Since the educational system is at times lackluster in Kenya, my parents spent a considerable amount of their income to place my sister and me in Elite Primary School. At the time, the school fees totaled half of my parents' income. Later my

parents would transition us into cheaper primary schools but they maintained strict tutoring schedules to make sure we did not digress back in the quality of our learning.

In 1990, my father had the opportunity to pursue his undergraduate degree and shortly after, we joined him in Nairobi. I watched my father and listened to the stories that both he and others in my community shared on how privileged we were that he was in college, I grew up with a fundamental understanding of the endless possibilities that education could bring. At this point in Kenyan history, not many people had studied beyond high school largely due to the lack of colleges and universities in the country.

Upon completion of my father's undergraduate studies, we settled in Nairobi where my father worked as a minister in the church. Religion was an integral part of my upbringing and an integral part of the lives of virtually all Kenyans, be they Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Church played into the structure of my upbringing and would help cement the idea that individual progress was to be celebrated and shared with the society as a whole. In that regard, bettering the community was not only taught but modeled by many of the adults that I saw. This modeling worked to influence the choices that I would later make in life and the career aspirations that I would hold. Thus when my family had the opportunity to come to America for our studies and I ultimately reached college and graduate school, my career choices though personal took into consideration what the community or society expected of me and how I could also become a beneficial member of society.

My family settled in Texas and we spent most of our time in Troy, TX (a small town with a population of 1,305). I went to high school in Troy and later to college in the nearby town of Belton. After graduate school, I decided to pursue my doctoral studies and move to Washington,



DC to work for an international development organization. My career goals include reaching out to fellow individuals through simple tasks that aggregately, and if done collectively, can change society for the better. As my community noted, we each have a responsibility to our fellow man and we fail as a society when we, as individuals, fail to act on that responsibility.

### **Participant 8: South Korea (M)**

I lived in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, for 31 years. Seoul is the largest city in South Korea with a population of 10 million, it is similar to New York City. I lived in the north-east area of Seoul where only few people are able to go to university. However, I made friends and got an undergraduate degree through a church which was located in the Gangnam area, which is in the southern area of Seoul. Gangnam is similar to the affluent Manhattan area of New York City. The church I attended has only university students as members.

I grew up in a family with intellectual curiosity. All of my family members including grandfather, father, mother, uncles, aunts, siblings and cousins have undergraduate or masters degrees. Most of them graduated from prestigious high-schools and the university. My grandfather and my uncle tried to study abroad in Japan or the U.S. (but they did not make it). At that time, very few people could enter the university in South Korea, and most people could not imagine studying abroad.

I have also been influenced by faith and religion and it was a key determinant when I chose a career. Religion motivates me to be a person who contributes to society and helps people. I want to solve social problems and be a mentor to young people. When I was a teenager, South Korea had an economic recession and was under the control of the IMF. In this context, many young people now consider job-security as a key factor when they choose a job.

Finally, I have a negative impression with regard to conglomerates in South Korea. Since 1960, conglomerates in South Korea have been developed through political and business collusion. As a result, only few conglomerates dominate whole market of South Korea. Conglomerates such as Samsung, LG, Hyundai, Kia do not cooperate with other small or medium size companies. Whenever small or medium size companies develop their own products through their own research and development, the conglomerates absorb them. In my opinion, conglomerates in South Korea are similar to imperialist countries in previous history. I want to be an expert who can contribute by solving social problems like this.

### **Participant 9: Thailand (M)**

I'm a 34 years old Thai citizen. I'm from Chiangmai, Thailand (the 2nd largest city of the country), but my house is located in rural area of Chiangmai. I lived there for 32 years and then for two years in Bangkok.

I graduated from all schools and university in Chiangmai and I started my first job after I got a bachelor's degree in Political Science. I worked in the biggest food company in Thailand in a human resource department for two year and got a lot of training on HR topics but I would have to move to other branches if I wanted to get a promotion. Even though my boss guaranteed that I would get promoted, this was not the direction I wanted for my life. I needed to do something that more valuable and consistent with my self-interest. After thinking and consulting with many people including my boss, I decided I wanted to be a professor in a university.

I began my graduate study in MPA at Chiangmai University and I chose this program because I saw a potential to get a job as a professor. Studying hard resulted in a scholarship from the Japanese government for my MPA study and I got a scholarship from the Tokyo Foundation, Zazakawa Young Leadership program. The foundation provided funding for tuition, fees, and

living and the opportunity for me to observe classes in other universities around the world. It was the best decision in my life because I was then able to get a job as a lecturer in a Thai university. I worked for two years at this university but I realized that it was necessary for me to get a doctoral degree and I wanted to get one in the United States.

At the beginning it was difficult for me to get accepted in a Ph.D. program because my English language skills were so bad. However, because of my passion and hard work it is going well. Now, I'm studying for a Ph.D. and in a specialization that I am interested in. My plan for the future is to apply for a job in the U.S. or with an international organization. Even though I still have a contract with my workplace in Thailand, I think I can pay them back in five to eight years if I get a salary from these universities and organizations.

#### **Participant 10: Taiwan (M)**

I was raised in a middle class family with two siblings in a small farming community, which has only 20,500 people. Most people in my hometown are farmers and cannot afford to get a college degree but I pursued one and an MPA in the biggest city in my country.

In my MPA program, I met my advisor and he told me his experience of studying at the University of Maryland, and I was eager to see the world outside of my country. In 2005, I discussed with him my plan to study abroad but he encouraged me to have work experience first. I worked in a city government for a couple of years and saved money for study abroad. While studying in Texas, my advisor has pushed me to attend meetings and conferences.

My father was a businessman and was interested in education. Thirty years ago, my hometown did not have any university and my father and two of his friends established one there. He devoted his whole life to education. My older brother is a professor in the Department of Business Management and a school board member at the university, and my sister is a public

official in the Bureau of Education and lectures one or two classes at the university each year. During the time I worked in city government, I lectured one class (labor relations) at the university on Saturday mornings. However, having only a Master's degree was questioned by some people because most of professors have Ph.D. degree.

I am concerned about disadvantaged people and social issues because of the influence of my mother. She has been an environmental volunteer for more than 20 years. In the past four years, she stopped volunteering because my father was ill and she stayed home to take care of him. My mother told us that she feels happy when she volunteers. She has always told me that there are many things that money can't buy and many things that you cannot use money to measure.

My experience in the military further enforced my beliefs to explore social issues contribute to society. In my two-year experience in the military we helped with regional disaster assistance. After that time, I worked in government in a social welfare agency but during that time the government suffered budget distress which affected the delivery of services. When I saw citizens in need of care go without it, I was sad that the government could not offer them the services they needed. This stimulated my ambition to do research that can help governments enhance their capacity.

My uncle is the director of fire and emergency services in local government and he encouraged me to pay attention to regional issues and to have a risk management license. I am now a member of a fire prevention association and in my country, restaurants, shopping malls, stores, and the like must have a licensed advisor. The license owner needs to have training classes each year, which are held by the fire prevention associations. To update my status, requires two days of class training every two years. In sum, my career choices have been

influenced by my family, an advisor, my previous work experience and the military, and a professional association.

## **Interview findings**

In one-hour face-to-face interviews we asked respondents questions about their experiences with professional membership associations in both their home country and in the United States. The semi-structured interview protocol included seven sections: 1) Culture and joining behavior, 2) Member involvement in professional associations in country of origin, 3) Member involvement in professional associations in the U.S., 4) Membership social capital, 5) Value of membership, 6) Volunteering, and, 7) Advice for associations. Findings from each section are presented below

### **Findings: Section 1) Culture and joining behavior**

*In this section we report findings from the following questions: What is the culture of joining in your country? Specifically, are there many clubs and groups and other opportunities for joining and membership in your country?*

All of our participants noted that there is evidence of joining behaviors in their cultures. Participants from Ghana and Kenya noted that it was very common for people to join informal groups such as bible study and church groups, women's and men's guilds, and communal organizations. A respondent from Thailand said, "Yes, we have a lot of opportunities. For example, adults may join the Red Cross, and car clubs and sports clubs are popular. For young people it is more soccer clubs and something like boy-scouts." Likewise, a participant from Mexico noted, "Yes, there are a lot of different types of organizations including sports, arts or culture. They target all age groups."

Religious groups, sports clubs, youth soccer, and hobby groups were among the types of associations mentioned by all participants. Patterns of responses varied slightly, however, with regard to the formality of the groups. For example, all of our participants from African countries noted that although many groups exist, most are informal and connected with the local community through church or school. A participant from Kenya said “Most of the groups that people can join are largely informal football (soccer) clubs, or groups associated with church and neighborhood. There are not many professional or membership based associations that people can join.” Another Kenyan noted “There are no specific membership clubs that you join. Mostly people join small volunteering organizations with friends in an informal way.” A student from The Gambia said, “No, not many. I don’t think a lot of people know about any clubs, if there are any. The only club I can think of is the Rotary Club.”

Joining behaviors appear to differ somewhat by cultural region. A Saudi Arabian student, for example, noted that although there were many small clubs, “there are not many socialization opportunities for political reasons. There are some boy scout-like groups arranged for boys in schools, and some religious and sport (e.g. football) clubs. But these are largely informal.”

Other cultures, however, support both informal groups and large, formal associations. A participant from China said, “When I was working on my master’s degree in urban planning I joined an Urban Planner’s club. Also in college I was a member of some student organizations.” A respondent from Taiwan said, “Associations are very common in Taiwan because of citizens’ active involvement in political life. It is very easy to create a political party in our country, and we have more than 200 political parties. Political is understood very broadly, like advocacy groups.” A participant from South Korea noted that joining a sports club or hobby group was not disconnected from career pursuits. “Parents in South Korea care passionately about educating

and developing their children. They want them to be sports players in soccer or basketball, or famous scientists or mathematicians. It is a part of our culture to attend a group or be a member of some kind of association.”

Changes in the size and scope of associations may also vary as noted by our participant from Nepal. “We are a developing country and ten years ago there were no NGOs. Now due to the improvements in education and increased awareness there are a lot more formally organized and registered organizations. Most of NGOs focus on capacity building, some are advocacy organizations...” [and some address social issues]. “Right now there is a big awareness campaign that is going on there, especially about girls’ education, so a lot of organizations are working on it.”

The awareness of the presence or absence of organized professional associations captured in the above comments does not answer the question of whether, or to what degree, formal nonprofits exist in any given country. What our findings illustrate is the familiarity with which our respondents have to various forms of group activity. In other words, while collectively our respondents most often mention informal sports clubs or religious circles, these responses probably reflect associations that are familiar to them. As a child and young adult, our participants’ socialization experiences are most likely drawn from school, family and spiritual upbringing. Our findings should not be used to infer that large, formal associations do not exist in each of the countries. In fact, nine of our twelve respondents indicated that a family member, friend or colleague did belong to a professional association.

## **Findings: Section 2) Member involvement in professional associations in country of origin**

*To learn about membership participation, we asked interview respondents to tell us about any memberships that they held in professional associations in their home country. Later, we asked them to compare these experiences with those of any professional associations that they had joined (in the U.S.). (Questions 16-23)*

*Did you or do you belong to any professional association in your home country? What are these?*

Of the 12 students interviewed, just four reported that they had been a member of any professional association in their home country: one in Ghana (a member of three), two respondents from South Korea (one is in two, and one is in a single professional group), and a student from Nepal who is a member of two associations. Our respondent from Ghana belongs to three agriculture related membership associations. The S. Korean respondents each belonged to professional associations concerned with research in the public sector (their area of study), and our Nepalese respondent belonged to two organizations, one in urban planning and engineering, and the other for architecture.

As noted earlier, most students reported that their country of origin did support and promote joining behaviors. Participants were especially familiar with sports clubs and informal groups. When asked in interviews: Are there many professional associations in your country? Eight of the 12 respondents reported yes, but four did not think that many existed. Among the professions with recognized membership associations were those connect to academics, urban planning, certified public accountants, engineering, procurement managers, doctors, and lawyers.

*Regarding the professional associations in your home country, we asked: “Do you know what they usually do?”*

Most suggested that the associations regularly published journals, organized conferences, provided grants and offered research opportunities. Some noted that they provided education and



professional certifications. However, one African respondent noted that associations focused more on community issues than member services. He said, “There are not many professional associations because in my country (Kenya) the nonprofit sector is very underdeveloped. Local government doesn’t perceive them as productive so communities are more supportive of government-based initiatives. Also, professionals are obligated to do something for the betterment of communities so that is what those that do exist do.” Another Kenyan noted “...a lot of them do communal-based outreach, so not much is focused on members. Instead it is on the outward involvement of members in society.”

*Just four of our 12 respondents reported joining a professional association in their home country. We asked the others, “Why haven’t you been a member?”*

Most answers referred to age and professional status. Sentiments expressed included, “...at the time I was there I was an undergraduate student and they serve mainly professionals in the field. I was not a professional when I left the country.” Likewise, “I was not educated enough at that time to join them.” Another offered, “There is a kind of elitism that goes with membership in professional associations.”

Three of the four students who had joined a home country professional association learned about it in a graduate program through faculty members. “I received a Master degree in that profession so I was encouraged to register to become a member. To a big extent it is a requirement for the industry to be a member of a professional association,” and “Faculty members generally support students joining and participating in professional groups. There is a notion of ‘knowledge donation’ or ‘skill donation’ in S. Korea where a professional is encouraged to teach and train others for free.” Another said, “It was through my student association. My university is ranked top seven in the South East Asia, so student associations are

very active and they always publish monthly magazines.” Two other comments suggested that in Nepal and in Ghana, a membership is an expected part of starting a career.

Those who held a membership in their home country were generally satisfied with it. The reasons included, “I could put it on my CV, and it is widely regarded across the country if you are a member of a professional association. He also said, “KASER [a South Korean group] is a practitioner-professional association with no required fees, you can pay any sum if you want to, and so I was willing to pay because I saw a benefit for myself. It was good, because at the time there were no exams to enter those associations. Later you had to take an exam to qualify for membership.” He then concluded, “The bad thing is that even though I registered for membership back in 2006, I haven’t renewed it since then and I still get emails from them. So I wonder how often do they update their membership base.”

*We asked participants what activities they enjoyed in their home country associations.*

Annual conferences were valued. “I helped to organize some of the meetings--it is expected of you to do those things because you’re in the profession.” Another said “I volunteered in KASER to organize a conference and educational program and in KAPA (another organization), I presented my research.” A student from Nepal said, “I was actively involved in a workshop and I volunteered during meetings and exhibitions, welcoming guests and those types of things.” Finally, “I attended conferences as their staff member and I was compensated for editing conference articles and brochures.”

### **Findings: Section 3) Member involvement in professional associations in the U.S**

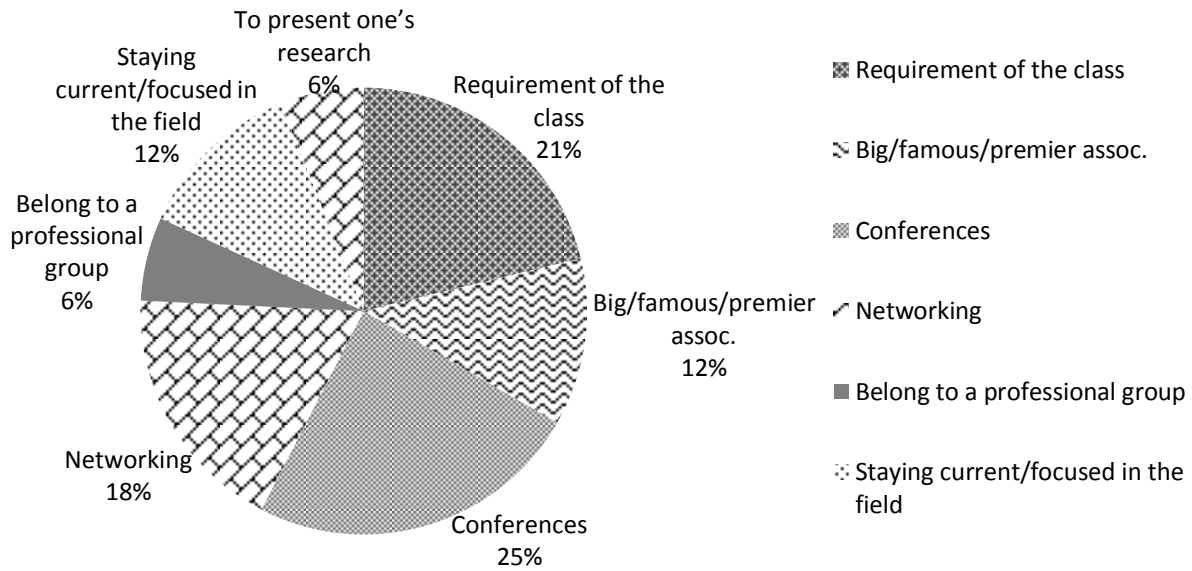
*In interviews we asked respondents about their experiences with professional associations in the U.S. “Are you a member of a professional association in the U.S.? How many professional associations do you belong to?” (Questions 24-32)*

Of our twelve participants, only one (the participant from Ghana), is not currently a member of a professional association in the U.S. All others are members of academic, research related educational professional associations. Among these include American Society of Public Administration, Southern Political Science Association, Western Political Science Association, Western Social Science Association, Urban Affairs Association, Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Associations, Association for Budgeting and Financial Management.

In all cases, a membership in a professional association is required by the Ph.D. program in which the students are enrolled, thus, all respondents had to join at least one. However, the selection process is more nuanced (see Figure 1). The selection and choice of the association to join is heavily influenced by faculty members or if the student “wanted to attend a particular conference.” Other reasons included size, “I was told it the biggest one in the field.” The relevancy of the information provided and the need to be current were also reasons to join. Here, respondents said, “I wanted to know what the new emerging topics are in the field. Also, to attend conferences, to network with others, to meet new people, and also because associations like ASPA are well recognized. You have to be a member, if you want to stay current.”

“I wanted to present papers at their conferences. To be honest, it was cheaper to pay as a member than as a non-member, so there was a financial motivation.” We also heard comments such as, “I joined because it is the premier association for nonprofit scholars. In order to stay in tune with what is going on in the field, to network, share information and things like that. Also, “For networking opportunities and to be able to attend conferences.”

**Figure 1: Why did you join your particular professional association?**



In Figure 1, the students who said that they wished to “belong to a professional group,” explained the motivation as being identified with a particular group of scientists and experts. This response reflects a concern for affiliation and status. Both the need to belong and the need to be viewed as a peer-professional are rooted in sociological and psychological theories of affiliation and esteem (Maslow, 1949). The desire to fulfill these needs can be strong motivators.

The responses shown in Figure 1, depicted as “Conference” or “Networking” reflect distinctive yet overlapping reasons to join. Specifically, the conference category is broader than that of networking. In this category we have classified responses that denote personal benefits such as presenting personal research (crucial to individual success in an academic career), or to attend other panels (to acquire information and participate in discussion). However, students also attend conferences hoping to network with others.

All of the responses in the “conference” category are career driven. For Ph.D. students, attendance or presentations at annual or semi-annual conferences are important means of establishing oneself as a member of the profession. Conference venues are used to “get the word

out” about one’s own research, to meet and interact with others doing similar work, and to interview for job positions. Conferences also provide opportunities for international students (in particular) to achieve those goals. Students will join an association to save money on conference expenses and travel. At some conferences, sponsorships, scholarships and volunteering opportunities are offered to help students cover the conference registration fees.

For the 18% of respondents who identified “Networking,” as their reason for joining an association, the category captures the need to meet people face-to-face and establish personal connections. Although most students are strong users of technology, research has shown that nothing can replace face-to-face interactions in building personal connections (Preece, McLoughlin, & Dawson, 2001). Both conference attendance and networking opportunities as “reasons to join” are instrumental in nature and here, the motivation for students is directed towards affiliation, professional and career growth, and recognition by others.

Of the 11 study participants who belong to a U.S. based professional association, all but one list it on their resume (CV). Reasons for listing it include, from China, “it makes me feel as an insider, like I’m accepted in the field of professionals.” Similarly, a Kenyan noted “it shows that I belong to a society of professionals and socialize. It has an impact in the field.” A participant from Mexico noted that “It seems to be important.” Our respondent from Saudi Arabia noted that it was included on his resume because, “it’s prestigious to belong to a professional society.”

#### **Findings: Section 4) Membership social capital**

*We asked participants about their U.S. memberships and the regularity with which members interacted with other members. Included here were the questions: How often do you meet other members in your professional membership association?, Have you made any new friends or professional connections in your membership association?, Are you connected to any*

*other groups in your profession because of your membership? (Questions 27, 28, and 35). These questions are relevant to learning more about the bonding and bridging that may be occurring via the membership experience.*

Of the 11 responses, nine reported meeting other members (aside from their classmates who may belong to the same organizations) just once a year and only at a conference. The two other responses included “not often, I’m just a new member” and “not often, I do get emails to attend meetings but I have not attended any yet.”

Not surprisingly, responses to questions about making friends and connections have been mixed since face-to-face connections are sparse. Still, some responses demonstrate strong connections. “Yes, I met three students in Indiana, a professor in Washington, DC, and a professor in Texas.” “Yes, at ARNOVA I’ve made some connections, I’m not sure I can call them friends, but we still talk,” and “Yes, when I went to a conference I met some people and we exchanged business cards.” A respondent from Kenya was enthusiastic about having developed new friendships and said, “Yes, two very good ones actually. One is a professional contact but the other is now a close friend.” A Taiwanese respondent noted “Yes, I have two new friends and colleagues in Taiwan.”

Some responses were “not yet.” A respondent from China said, “No, I cannot recall any. I gave my business card once to a person but never heard back.” And from Thailand, “No friends, and only three professional connections.” A participant from Nepal said “As of now, I met some, but I don’t remember their names.”

*We also wondered whether a membership in one association was likely to lead to increased connections with other groups. Thus we asked: Are you connected to any other groups in your profession because of your membership?*

Only the participant from Nepal reported a connection to any other professional association due to their current membership. All other responses were either an outright “no” or the reason for connection was attributed to a source other than their current membership. An example includes the response from our Chinese participant, “I am connected to a group called the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), but I’m connected to them because of my major professor not because of a professional association.”

### **Findings: Section 5) Value of membership**

*In this section we report on the value that members derive from their association membership and the selective benefits that they use.*

Overall, respondents viewed the value of an association membership as including an enhanced resume, acquisition to up-to-date information and professional publications, and as an avenue for “keeping up with the field.” Networking is also deemed an important benefit. Our participant from Mexico noted, “The value of access to information and access to people...the sector, jobs, and current developments.” A Kenyan noted “It allows me to intermingle with my peers.” A feeling of prestige is also valued. Our participant from Thailand said, “I know people in my field and I meet big name professionals.”

The benefits of the professional membership association that are valued most by our participants, without exception, are those connected to research in the public administration field. These benefits included information, access to journals, and travel to conferences. Each of these is important for Ph.D. students to succeed in an academic field and to secure a job in the future. Thus statements such as “It helps me to stay updated in the field, to know what events are happening, what are the new books, topics, etc.,” and, “I get monthly journals...and in emails that precede new journal issues I get to see what articles will be published.”

Other benefits were similarly valued, “You can go to conferences if you’re a member, plus networking,” “it’s good for jobs and you get automated emails.” Another summed up the value by saying, “It helps you forward your academic career.”

*In interview question 31 we asked respondents: How often do you use your membership benefits? What are the benefits that you use most often?*

Surprisingly, given earlier responses, six students indicated that they rarely used their benefits while the other five noted that they read materials at least four times a year (three students), monthly (one student) or very frequently--at least weekly (one student). Results were likewise mixed regarding how often they visited the association website (Question 33) with three students noting a frequent weekly or more often visit, and eight students visiting rarely or only a few times a year.

An example of the infrequent use of the website included, “I visit a few times a year, to renew my membership, or look up for conference information, or proposal dates.” Students also used their association’s website to find information about conferences, proposal submissions, grant opportunities, upcoming events, and papers. Newsletters sent via email were typically read as they arrived, “I read it every time they send it.” Some noted that they did not fully read the newsletter but skimmed the headlines looking for stories of interest.

*In question 37 we asked: Where do you get your primary information about your profession or career? Is it your professional association or something else? Please, list your resources.*

Just three students noted that their primary information about their profession or career came from their association. Here, a student from Ghana said, “Mainly [from the association] website. I started using it even before I came to the Ph.D. program. What I usually look for are what jobs are available.” The student from Nepal said, “from the association’s emails.” And the



participant from Mexico likewise said, “My association.” More frequently students noted faculty members, colleagues or friends as their primary source of information about the profession. “The major source of information for me is my committee members and my department.”

*Regarding whether they were getting value for the money they paid to belong to their association (Question 32), almost all (10 of 11) felt that they were. The free subscriptions, networking opportunities, conference discounts and teaching materials were mentioned as excellent membership benefits received for the money.*

Because our respondents have not yet realized their career aspirations, they do not believe that as of yet their professional association has had much of an effect on their careers.

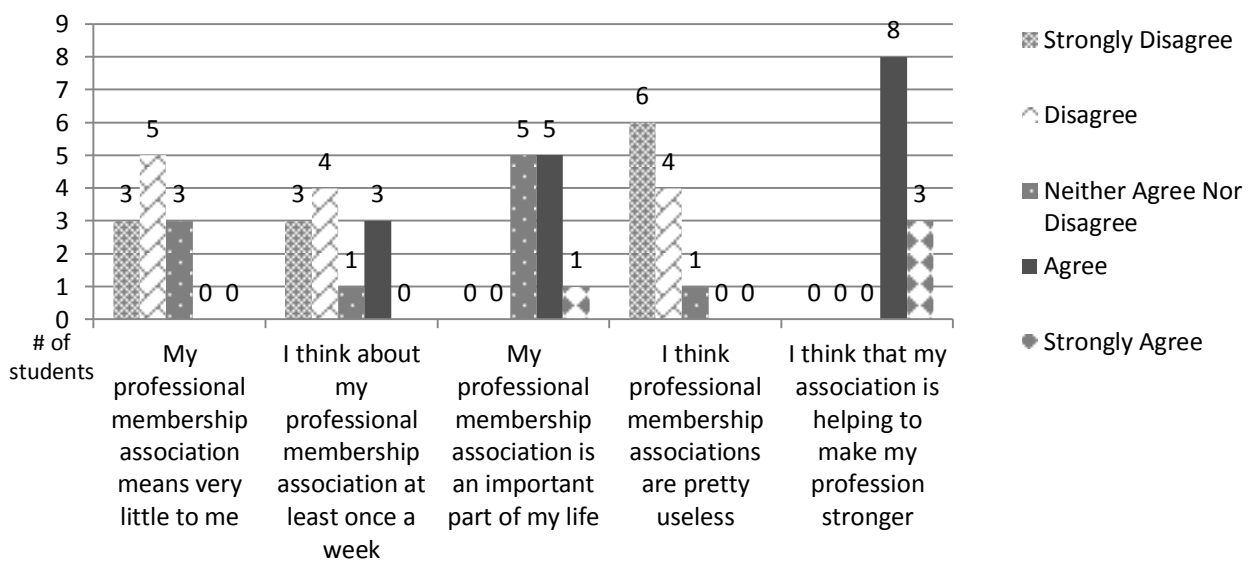
Nonetheless, they are optimistic about the effect of an association membership may have in the future. “It doesn’t have much effect on my career at this point, but when I get my Ph.D., I will see more benefits from attending their events. It is valuable because it offers a great opportunity to make academic friends,” said a respondent from Taiwan.

Five others also noted positive effects of association membership. “It does change some ways of how I think about my profession and how I do my research,” said the student from China. A participant from South Korea said, “I think it has some positive effects, like conference networking, professional workshops, one-day educational sessions that provide some valuable knowledge.” A participant from Kenya noted, “it keeps me more informed, and especially with the research, I know what has been done so that I don’t have to repeat somebody’s work.” A respondent from Mexico said, “I think it has a positive effect. Being a member is a status-thing and I’m serious about my career in the nonprofit sector. Also it provides an opportunity for me to get scholarly development, continue to get updated about information and to develop networks and working relationships.” A student from The Gambia said “I think it looks good on your resume. It lets potential employers know that you’re connected to the field,

which lets them know that you're current and up to speed. So in that regard it adds a lot of value." Finally, a respondent from Saudi Arabia said, "It's good to have a membership when you apply somewhere because it shows that you went a step further in your career and showed a deeper interest in it."

Figure 2, also shows the value of an association membership to the study respondents.

**Figure 2: What value does your professional membership bring to you?**



As is shown, every respondent either agreed or strongly agreed that their association is upholding the collective good of the profession and serving its interests. These findings suggest that associations enjoy a very high reputation among members. Likewise, respondents overwhelmingly disagreed with negative statements about their association's value. The statements, "My professional membership association means very little to me" and "I think professional membership associations are pretty useless" had no support. Consistent with a positive interpretation are the ratings for "My professional membership association is an

important part of my life” and “I think that my association is helping to make my profession stronger,” each of which is rated very highly.

The statement, How often do you think about your association?, shows that over half of the respondents (7/11), do not think about their association on a weekly basis. This time frame does not appear to be a strong indicator of the importance or value of a professional association to respondents, but it does show that associations are not part and parcel of their everyday life. If the same question were asked about their relationship to their Facebook or Twitter accounts, we suspect that there would be different rating outcomes. Although we are not seeking to directly compare personal social media accounts and professional web-based media each is a technology based approach to information exchanges and interactions. Each also represents the means by which contemporary relationships and social capital is facilitated.

Overall, what we have learned from the ratings in Figure 2 is that associations are important to respondents and valued highly, but saliency does not appear to be associated with these findings. Whether strategies for encouraging saliency would result in stronger bonds is not established, but worthy of consideration.

*In interview question 39 we asked students who had been a member in a home country association to compare that experience with their U.S. association experience.*

A respondent from Taiwan said, “It’s totally different, associations in Taiwan focused on practice and training, joining usually ensures that you to make new friends and improve your job skills. But here in the US it is more academic and focused on education, so they are different.” A South Korean student said, “In the U.S. professional information covers our field and there is a good deal of sharing resources through websites. In South Korea there are more opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and visible opportunities to share information. It is easy to meet others,

and because the country is smaller and it is easier to travel to whatever event an association may have. On the other hand, if you don't personally participate in a meeting, it may be hard for you to obtain the information that was provided. In the U.S. you can easily get it online."

Our respondent from Nepal said "I think, PMAs in the U.S. are much better organized and operated compared to those in my home country. It may be because of the access to more resources and they are more active than at home. At home they are only active once a year during elections or when they need something like donations. But here they have these weekly conferences, webinars and other events." A student from Thailand noted, "The experience with the informal network in my country is more valuable and beneficial for me, because I can get side jobs or research projects out of it. It brings something special and valuable to me and to my career."

*We also asked students whether they intended to renew their memberships and why.*

In all cases except two (Saudi Arabia and The Gambia), all expected to renew for reasons related to the benefits previously discussed--to stay updated on conferences, information, and to add to their resume. For the two students who were "not sure" one indicated it would depend on whether she would be attending a conference, and for the other, whether he would remain on the same career path.

## **Findings: Section 6) Volunteering**

*In this section, we asked respondents about volunteering. Here, we wanted to determine why respondents choose to volunteer, where they volunteer, and whether volunteering for their professional association is of interest to them. Findings in this section are drawn from responses to interview questions 40-49.*

All 12 Ph.D. respondents are active volunteers in nonprofit organizations but not in their professional associations. All but one student (from Thailand), had volunteered at some point in

their lives at a nonprofit organization and in a variety of areas including church (Ghana), Red Cross (China), environmental clean-up (Taiwan), environmental justice (South Korea), feeding the homeless (Kenya), girl's education (Nepal), conferences (South Korea), local food banks (Kenya), battered women's shelter (Mexico), book drives (The Gambia), and student association at the university (Saudi Arabia).

*When asked if they had volunteered for their professional membership association? Four students noted that they had done so.*

The activities included helping to organize a national conference for agricultural organizations (Ghana), a student from China volunteered with emergency training and drills, and a South Korean student organized meetings and conference. Another South Korean student noted that "Currently I provide regular reports to KASER about environmental research in the U.S. translated into Korean. I'm also a guest-editor for a journal focusing on emergency management in South Korea." According to all of these sources, their perception of the value of their membership changed for the better after volunteering. Thus, there appears to be a payoff for associations to promote volunteering activities that extends beyond the donation of time, talent and projects completed by volunteers.

For example, the student from Ghana said, "My perception changed and I felt like I was able to talk more comfortably with other professionals in the field and about their and my work, I felt a sense of pride for what I'm doing, and I felt more associated with that association. I also identified myself more with that professional association." From China, "I changed a bit, before I volunteered I didn't value practitioners and their experiences that much. I also learned how much difference it makes for communities." From Nepal, "Prior to joining I thought about membership

primarily as a way to fill your resume, but after volunteering I realized that you get to learn and to meet a lot of people.”

One of the major reasons offered by respondents who have not volunteered for their professional association is their status—most are young, first year members who have not yet recognized any opportunities to volunteer. Nonetheless, this should not be taken to mean that there is no interest. The majority of our respondents (11/12) expressed an interest in volunteering for their professional associations.

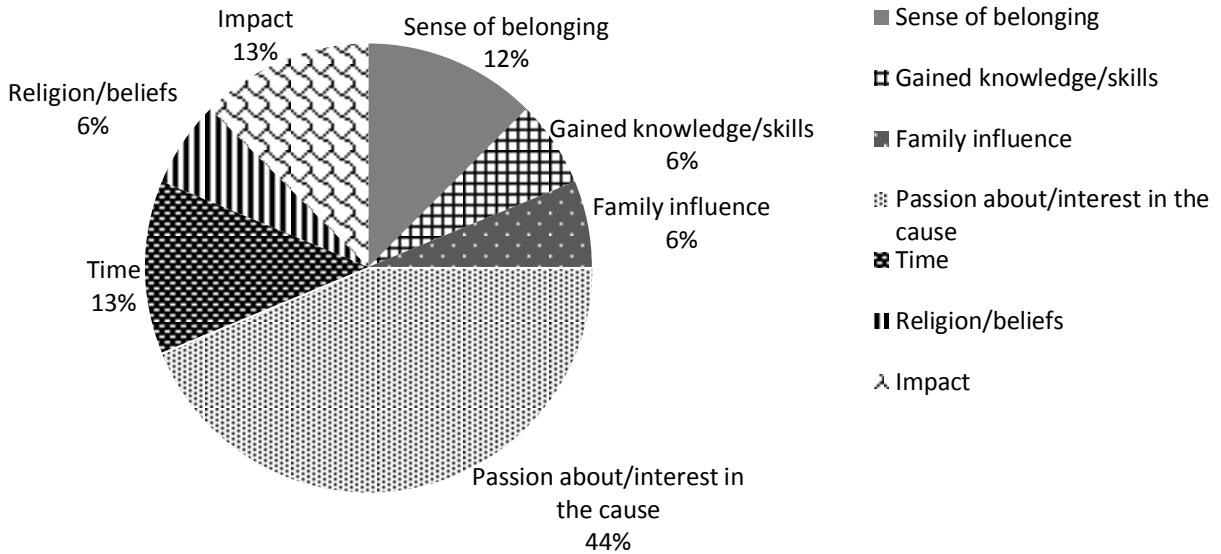
Culturally, all respondents expressed that they had been active volunteers in their country of origin with the sole exception of the respondent from Thailand who had never volunteered. A few variations by country were observed during interviews. For example, both South Korean students and our respondent from Taiwan said that there was an obligation for a well-established person to give back to community. This sentiment was not echoed by participants from China or Thailand. Students from these two countries expressed a more individualistic outlook regarding volunteering in their association. Here, instrumental career motivations were offered as opposed to the consideration of any obligation to contribute to a larger community. Students from African countries including Ghana, Kenya and The Gambia all expressed strong religious and communal reasons for volunteering for an association. These reasons included the desire to help socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Helping behaviors are also encouraged by their churches and neighbors.

Figure 3, reports the findings when we asked respondents about why they would volunteer for any nonprofit organization (not necessarily their professional association). Here, 44% of the respondents identified “Passion about/interest in the cause” as their primary reason to

start volunteering. They noted that having a strong interest in the cause or holding a passion for it are important precursors to volunteering. This outweighed their concern about time, desiring a sense of belonging, or even concern about the eventual impact. Among other reasons they mentioned wanting to see a direct impact and what they do should be meaningful and result in helping others (13%). An obstacle to volunteering that was mentioned several times was time constraints (13%).

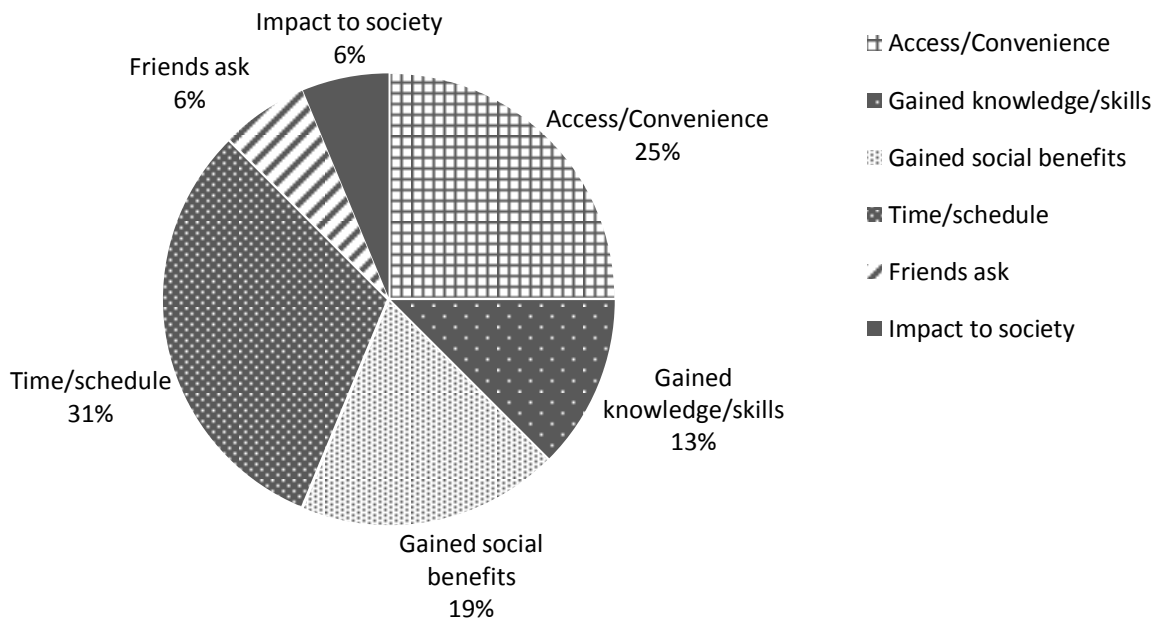
Although time is always a concern, Figure 3 shows that seven of the 12 respondents reported that they would volunteer for a nonprofit organization if they felt a sense of belonging (12%) and affiliation. Religious beliefs (6%), gained knowledge and skills (6%), and family influence (6%) were also mentioned as having an effect on their decision to volunteer. In the literature on volunteering religiosity has been one strong predictor of volunteering (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1994). It has its roots in charity and in organizations such as churches that are highly engaged in community activities. As for family influence, it has also been shown to be a common factor affecting volunteer decisions (Gage & Thapa, 2012). Lastly, the motivation to gain new knowledge and skills is a purely instrumental reason to start volunteering for a nonprofit (Ferreira, Proença, & Proença, 2012).

**Figure 3. What needs to happen for you to start volunteering for any nonprofit organization?**



The picture changes when respondents are asked about their motivations for volunteer for a professional association, however (Figure 4). Here, we see reasons that are much more instrumental.

**Figure 4. What should happen to make you start volunteering for your professional association?**





For association volunteering, respondents indicated that they would volunteer if their time and schedule allowed (31%), and if it were convenient, and accessible in terms of location. (25%). Compared to general nonprofit volunteering, respondents identify time as less of a constraint when asked about volunteering for their association. Other reasons included individual benefits such as gaining new knowledge or skills (19%), or reaping social benefits such as new connections (13%). Finally, the influence of friends (6%), and impact to society (6%) were each been mentioned by one respondent. It appears that social priorities are not as influential when considering professional association volunteering. When compared to volunteering for a charitable nonprofit, the motivation to volunteer for a professional association is more self-interested and instrumental.

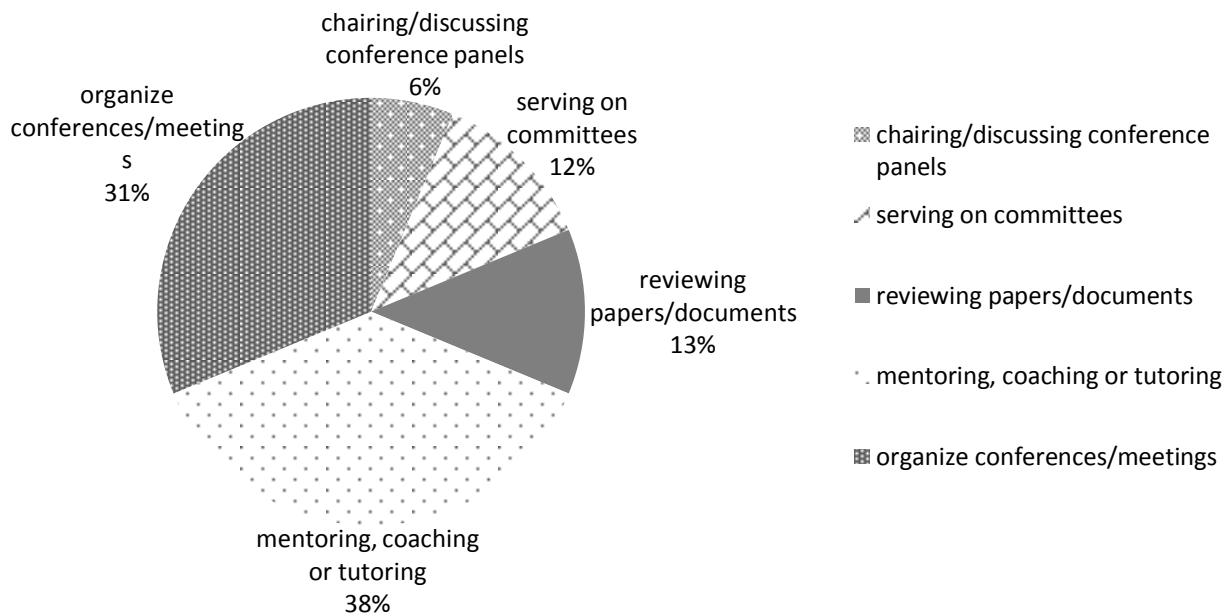
In responses to the ASAE (2007) “Decision to Volunteer” survey, the results showed that younger association members were more likely to volunteer for reasons of personal growth, professional and career benefits, recognition and to resolve personal issues than are their older counterparts. Research by Gazley and Dignam (2008) concluded that across all age groups young respondents are most likely to respond to career-related opportunities but they also appreciated altruism in volunteering. The need for personal growth and gaining knowledge is also important to young professional association members. These findings are all consistent with our own findings. Those in the early career stages highly value volunteering opportunities that advance career knowledge and skills, but some also want to give back to their community.

*In interview question 46 we also asked respondents about what type of volunteering activities that they would they prefer to carry out in a professional association?*

As is shown in Figure 5, tutoring or mentoring are the most common responses (38%), followed by organizing conferences or meetings (31%). A variety of activities were described.

From Kenya, “I see the importance of chairing panels, etc., and I would like to do those in the future, but tutoring and mentoring would be my first choice because of the effects that they can bring to others.” From Ghana, “I would be glad to volunteer if asked to help in organizing some events. If I’m associated I feel that I need to contribute back either with my time or with my money.” From South Korea, “I would support the association and be happy to help prepare a conference. I also can edit documents, because South Korea uses a different OS (Operational System), and I have this skill and I am good at it.”

**Figure 5. What type of volunteering activity would you prefer to carry out in your professional association?**

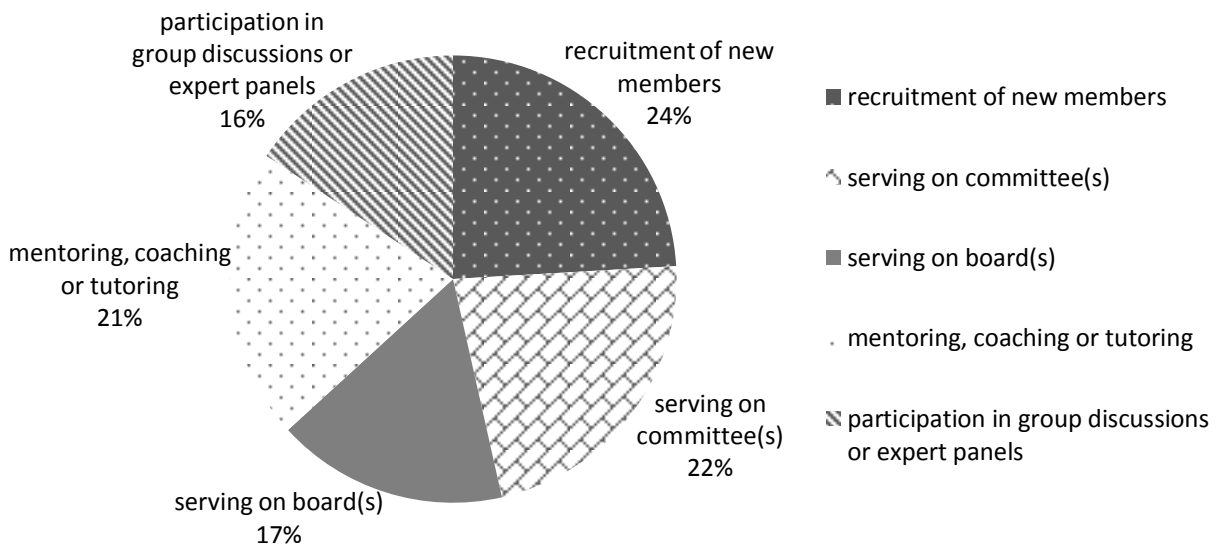


In Figure 5 we reported the type of volunteering activities that our international student respondents would like to perform for their association. However, in Figure 6, we report the actual volunteering activities that were performed by responses professional members. A survey question from the ASAE 2007 study asked: “In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following as a volunteer?” Thus, the comparison of the Figures 5 and 6 is made between

volunteer activities that members said they performed and our respondents' preferences of volunteer activities they would like to perform.

For example, mentoring, coaching or tutoring which was the top choice of international students (38%) was only the third most performed activity (21%) among current members of professional associations. Other types of volunteering activities that were performed by association members included the recruitment of new members (24%), serving on board(s) and committee(s) (17 % and 22% correspondingly), and participation in group discussions or expert panels (16%) (Figure 6). Our findings in Figure 5 that show respondents' interest in mentoring, tutoring and volunteering at conferences or meetings are activities that correspond nicely with what current members of professional associations are performing.

**Figure 6: Volunteering activities performed by association members (ASAE survey, 2007).**



Further, serving on committee(s) (13%) and chairing/discussing conference panels (6%) preferences of our respondents to some extent correspond with ASAE members' responses of serving on committee(s) (22%) and board(s) (17%) and participating in group discussions and/or expert panels (16%). The rest of the answers in two groups did not match. Our respondents

mentioned often participation in organizing conferences (31%) and reviewing papers/documents (13%). Associations' members (24%), on the other hand, mentioned recruitment of new members as a popular volunteering activity.

*An interest in the volunteering and actually volunteering are two different things. Thus, we also asked students what it would take for them to actually begin volunteering for their professional association?*

A student from Kenya said, "There needs to be a visible link on a personal level between my volunteer activity and impact to society, and to more disenfranchised groups. So if the link was clear I would be more inclined." Other responses were consistent with learning new skills and gaining knowledge or having direct benefits to their career in the future. Time was a concern and it was noted that "down the road" they would volunteer. Three answered that they would volunteer if asked either by a friend (Taiwan), or by another member (Mexico, The Gambia). These findings are consistent with previous studies on fundraising and volunteerism that show the importance of the "ask."

*We also asked students if they would volunteer for their professional association if the project was socially-important (i.e., such as helping disadvantaged groups of population).*

The student from Taiwan said, "Yes, helping people and especially those that are underserved or under qualified. It runs in our family culture to be very empathetic to poor." And from Kenya, "Socially important – precisely, I would definitely do that. The fact that they [professional associations] do not is what keeps the large majority of us from being as involved as we could be beyond listing it on a resume and going to conferences." The respondent from Nepal said, "Of course, because it is like an obligation, disadvantaged groups don't select their status, so if I have a higher status I should be obligated to help." The student from Saudi Arabia said "Yes, because it makes me feel good and makes society better." Two students, however, indicated that

having a socially-important project would not make a difference to them regarding whether they volunteered for their association (South Korea, China).

*We concluded our questions about volunteering by asking students: How do you perceive volunteering in a professional association as opposed to volunteering in a charitable organization (e.g., church)? As is shown, there is a clear distinction made between a faith-based or religious nonprofit and a professional association.*

Responses included, “I see them as entirely different, one is about faith, and I don’t have an excuse for not volunteering for my church. I have a strong affinity for a religious charity and only a sense of a requirement to belong to a professional association” (Ghana). From China, “It is not the same, professional association volunteering benefits only a small group, but in charitable nonprofits it usually benefits a bigger society. However, they are both important.” The participant from Taiwan said “Generally, nonprofit organizations directly help people, whereas professional associations help them indirectly by identifying social problems and communicating those to the government through a policy process. One respondent from South Korea said “They are different. For professional associations volunteering is more academic and the knowledge is shared horizontally between equally-educated people. In an NGO you can educate low-educated people, so it’s more vertical and more important because it bridges the gap between different groups of people.” Another South Korean said, “There are differences in mission. For example, volunteering for a PMA is about getting benefits and a professional advantage. Charities are organized to help others.”

A respondent from Kenya noted, “In a professional association, volunteering happens once a year during the conference, but in a charity there are more chances to volunteer throughout the year.” Another Kenyan said, “I see them as vastly different. In fact I don’t even view the former as volunteering--I just view it as being involved in the professional organization that I’m

paying dues to.” This was echoed by the student from Nepal, “I think when you volunteer in your own professional organization you’re basically thinking about your own self-interest. If you volunteer for a charity you’re thinking more about others. And many people in our society care more about their own careers than focusing on charitable events.” The student from Thailand said, “It is different, in a PMA the interests for volunteering are pretty narrow, and in charities they are broader and there are benefits for the society.” The student from The Gambia said “When I think about professional organization and volunteering, it doesn’t click for me, whereas volunteering in a charitable nonprofit does.” Finally, the student from Saudi Arabia noted “I think charitable volunteering is easier and you see the benefits immediately, but in a professional association it seems to be less beneficial overall. For example how does a review of papers for conferences benefit the society? I don’t see that link.”

Still, one saw few distinctions. The student from Mexico commented, “I don’t see any difference as long as there is a cause for it. If it’s a positive change or to help people I don’t see any difference whether it’s a charitable organization or an association.”

### **Findings: Section 7) Advice for associations**

*We asked participants to explain what new things an association could do to make their membership more attractive. Here, they offered the following,*

“I would like for them to give me a sense of belonging, give me more information, newsletters, development opportunities and training programs. I want to know what is happening in the field with other professionals, rather than receive a once-a-year email a few months before the conference with a request to register and pay for attendance. I want to be associated with a good cause. (Ghana). It is instructive to note that this response is from the only respondent without a U.S. association membership.

Other comments included, “I wish they could reduce conference registrations, and even make memberships free, and also provide some compensation for travels,” (China). Another said, “ASPA [American Society of Public Administration] is attractive to me because they have a conference [within a conference] for Ph.D. students only. I made some friends when I attended it this year. I wish they could hold more events just for students or at least hold student panels at their regular conferences (Taiwan).

A South Korean said, “Recently, I haven’t seen anything new. I think they need a wider use of social media involvement like sharing posts between different professional associations.” Also from South Korea, “I’d like benefits such as free or discounted publications.”

The students from Kenya both discussed new technology and virtual education. “Especially for international people who graduate and would like to go back to their home countries--keep providing benefits for them.” Also, “Have more partnerships with charitable organizations. Create activities that go beyond yearly conferences.”

The student from Nepal said “So far, I think they fail to attract members and to bring them close together. They send annual emails to announce that a meeting is here or there, but they should create more opportunities for socialization beside conferences. There should be sub-events for members to meet each other and hang out.” And from Thailand, “If they could publish interesting research papers that are easy for students to understand.” The respondent from The Gambia said, “Have more activities for local chapters and for students to be involved and engaged.” The participant from Saudi Arabia said “They could be more socially-directed.”

*In a final set of interview questions we asked students: Given your experience what would be one piece of advice that you would offer to people who run professional membership*

*associations?, and, Is there anything that we did not ask that you would like to share in the context of membership in professional associations?*

Here, understandably, students expressed concerns about how they, as international students and scholars, were valued by membership associations. The students from China and Taiwan said, “I wish they cared more about international scholars that are now in the U.S.,” and, “They should conduct surveys to get more feedback from different and diverse members, something comprehensive, not just to ask the core of their membership such as faculty, but also to learn something from students and to know what they think.”

A student-centered focus was also expressed by South Korean respondents, “They should pay more attention to MPA students who are considering getting their Ph.D. They need to be more open to younger people, like arranging mini-conferences to discuss issues of concern to MPA and Ph.D. students.” The other noted, “I don’t know about here [in the U.S.], but in South Korea I would recommend arranging conferences and seminars to bring people together.”

The frequency of interaction was also mentioned. A student from Kenya said that there needed to be “More opportunities to volunteer for members, not just during conference time, but maybe at a local chapter too,” and “I would tell them to think beyond the conference itself. I only think about those associations when the conference is coming around or when a paper submission is there. So if they can make me think about their association beyond just the conference date, it would be useful.” From Nepal, “Make the involvement of their members more frequent, they should seek the active participation of their members by asking them to engage more. Maybe sending contact information to members--it is all about interaction.”

The Gambian student said, “Be more accessible and communicate more with your members. It seems like organizations are so removed from their members. The place to start is



local chapters for engagement in communities. But as for my association's local chapter, it feels like people get in it just for the sake of it, they don't do anything, and it feels like people are disengaged."

The price of membership was mentioned by the Saudi Arabian student who said "Make it less expensive to join, and have more activities and events arranged for students-only." A South Korean student offered the following, "Community and organizational diversity matters because it increases participation and volunteering in a more diverse society," and "Professional associations are good for scholars and young scholars, but Ph.D. students need cheaper annual fees."

One comment was about leadership. "I would say leaders matter in any organization, so responsive and passionate leadership is important for any organization's successful existence," (Mexico). Additional advice, from Taiwan included, "If an association can create a mechanism that would help current members to find colleagues or friends from other countries and connect them it would be good. Recently I found out that a senior colleague dealing with citizenship issues is a member of my own association. I didn't know that he was a member--otherwise I would have sought him out at previous conferences I've attended."

And finally, from The Gambia, "I think with regard to volunteering, associations need to do more. Members should do more than just list those memberships on their resume. Those organizations also need to do social good."

### **Focus groups: Findings**

In two focus groups conducted in October 2013, (the results of which we have combined), study participants were asked about what was needed to succeed or achieve a

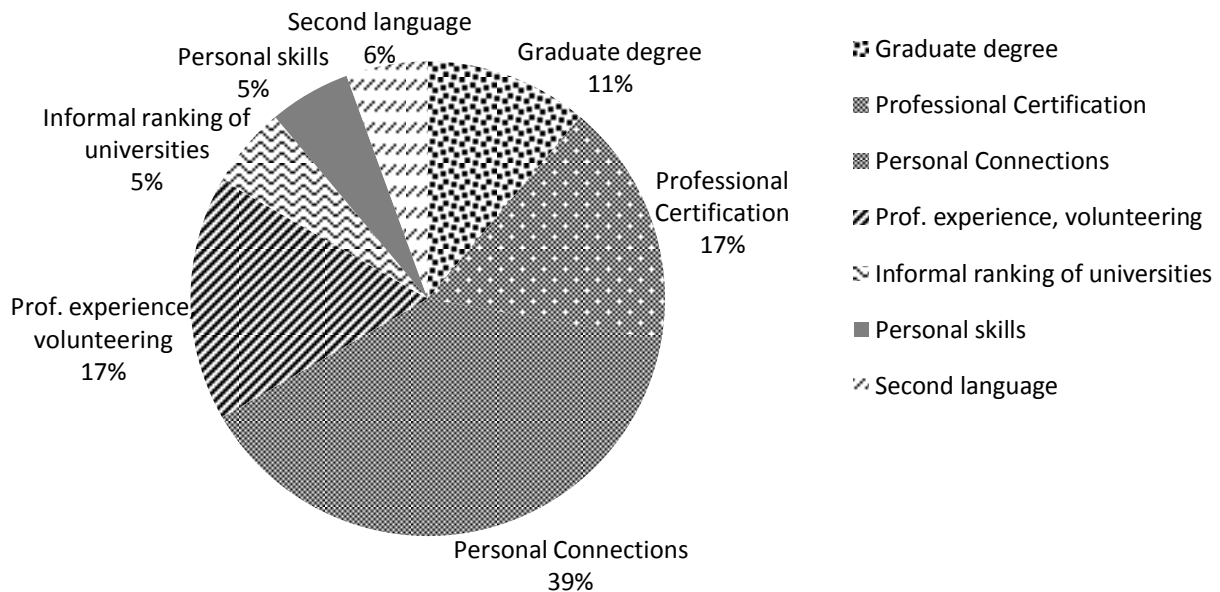
competitive advantage in a career in their home country. They were also queried about what benefits, if any, professional associations might have and whether or how a professional association could help in the achievement of career related goals. The questions were asked with the assumption that at least a basic level of professional education had been attained to steer the discussion into areas other than university related education.

### **Findings: Focus group question 1**

*In most countries a graduate degree is expected for someone entering into a professional career. In your country is there anything else you need to be successful in your profession?*

As shown in Figure 7, personal connections are viewed as most important to career success in any profession (39%). This is followed by experience (17%) and certifications (17%). Aside from a graduate (master's or Ph.D.) degree (which not all respondents mentioned as important for success in a profession) (11%), the majority indicated that personal connections – whether among family members or in one's profession are needed to successfully find and keep a job as well as move up the career ladder. Among other important factors were certificates that show one's competencies, hands-on experience whether gained through volunteering or at an internship or job. Respondents also mentioned the knowledge of a second language (6%) and personal skills (6%) such as good communication skills as expected to have when entering into a professional career. Finally, having a degree from a highly ranked university (5%) has been mentioned as having some effect on success in a profession.

**Figure 7. What is needed to be successful in your profession in your home country?**



Although these findings are not dramatically different than what we might expect in the U.S., some responses deserve special note. With regard to personal connections were the discussions of a “Godfather” in Ghana, “Line” in South Korea, “Plantas” in Mexico, and social directedness in Taiwan. The references to a “Godfather” or “Line” both represent personal connections that go beyond an acquaintance or the helping hand of a next door neighbor. These designations refer to powerful people within an industry; a superior that will protect and guide and underling. The notion of “Plantas” in Mexico refers to particular positions that are given as lifetime appointments. Establishing good relations with someone who “owns” this position helps to ensure that one could “inherit” it in the future.

Finally, for a person to have a successful career in Taiwan it is important to tackle social issues at work and volunteer for social causes. From our discussion in focus groups, it appears that in Taiwan, visibly engaging in meaningful and socially minded activity is important in securing career success.

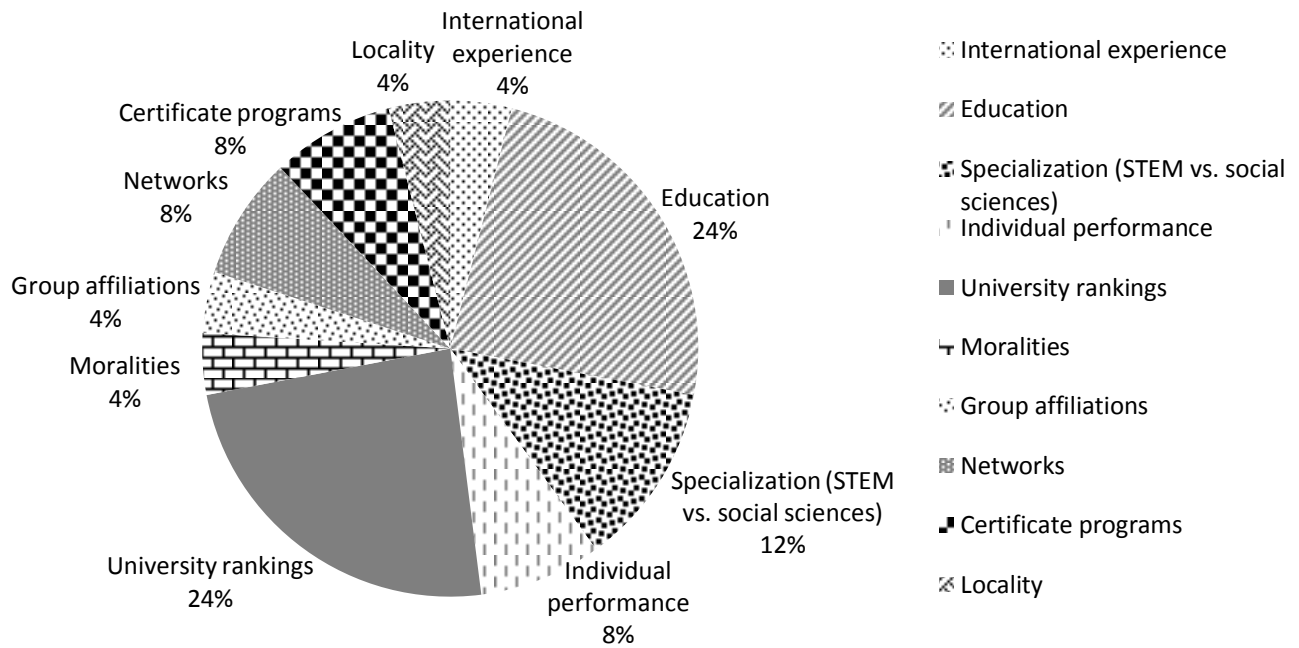
## **Findings: Focus group question 2**

*What is needed to have a competitive edge in securing a job in your profession in your country?*

Figure 8 shows answers to this question. Half of the responses indicate the importance of having a degree from a prestigious university (24%) and becoming educated in general (24%). For example, a Kenyan respondent indicated that public universities are preferred to private, and in South Korea and Thailand international education is more highly respected than obtaining a degree at home. Another 12% of respondents said that coming from a STEM or other highly valued specialization gives an edge in securing a job, whereas 8% mentioned the importance of personal performance. Personal or professional networks were also mentioned by 8% to be valuable in securing a job in a profession. Having an international experience (4%), going through certification programs (4%) or being affiliated with powerful or prestigious groups in one's field of profession also were assumed by our respondents to give an edge in a profession.

Among other responses were moralities (4%) and locality (4%). Moralities were described as moral qualities that are other regarding (altruistic). These are deemed to be very important for a public employee in South Korea, however their neighbor—China—identified instrumentality over altruism in seeking a competitive edge. Our respondent from China indicated that although the ability to apply one's knowledge and skill sets for the benefit of local community was not unimportant, it did not hold the same weight as the ability to bring money into one's organization. The latter is seen as much more important in securing a competitive edge in the profession. Locality refers to place. Much like the camaraderie that exists among those who graduate from the same university in the U.S. ("Go Tigers"), locality can benefit one when seeking a competitive edge.

**Figure 8. What is needed to have a competitive edge in securing a job in your profession in your country?**

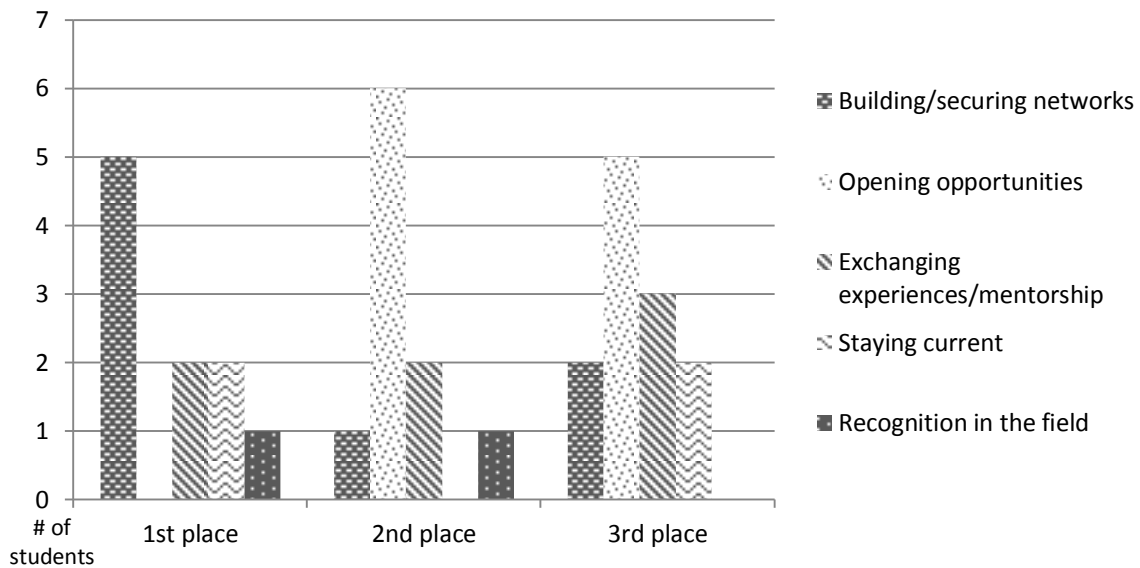


**Findings: Focus group question 3**

*What are the benefits, if any, of having professional or trade associations in your country?*

This question asked participants to first indicate any particular benefits that professional associations deliver to their members in respective countries, and then to rank order these benefits. The results are shown in Figure 9. Networking as a social benefit of professional association membership was ranked highest among all other choices—five respondents ranked it at the first place. Opening opportunities such as funding sources and continuous education were ranked second by most (6/12) participants. Finally exchanging experiences and staying current in the field occupied the third place, but were ranked as the first and second place benefits by some respondents. Recognition in the field, although mentioned, has not been ranked highly by our respondents, probably because it does not have a recognized and direct personal benefit.

**Figure 9. Benefits of professional membership associations: Rankings of benefits by focus group participants**

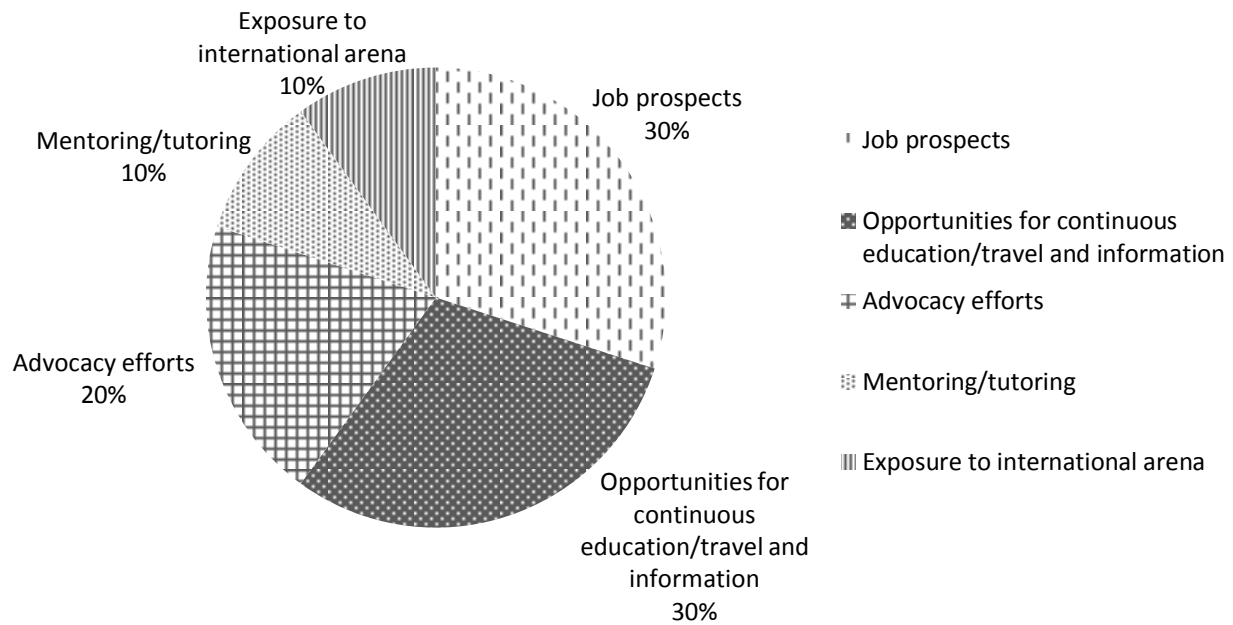


**Findings: Focus group question 4**

*What can a professional or trade association do to help you achieve success in your chosen profession?*

As shown in Figure 10, people indicated a preference for professional associations to provide career support which in the case of our participants included a continuous flow of information, education, research and opportunities for travel (30%). Our respondents equally valued solid job prospects that could be advertised or facilitated through their membership (30%). Advocacy, to strengthen the field and to further the interests of the members as professionals was also mentioned by 20% of the respondents. Mentoring and tutoring opportunities were not mentioned often (10%), but these activities could help professional associations establish bonds among new and existing members. Finally the respondent from Nepal indicated that professional associations could benefit not only their members but also a host country by holding international conferences, exhibitions, or other high profile events (10%).

**Figure 10. What can a professional or trade association do to help you achieve success in your chosen profession?**



## Analysis and Discussion

This qualitative report includes information derived through three data collection methods; written biographies, face-to-face interviews and focus groups. An analysis of our findings derived from each of these methods is presented in the forthcoming section. This is followed by a discussion of major themes, key points and implications derived from our study. Finally, we present two models for consideration and a conclusion.

## Biographies

Our analysis of the student biographies showed that most (8/10), identified family member(s) as having a great influence on their choice to pursue a professional career. This included encouraging them to pursue a university education, and serving as inspirational role models. The influence of family stretches across all cultures and is not surprising given that family background is a universal factor that shapes the world view of an individual. Most of our

participants grew up in a “traditional” two-parent household with both a male and female present. Most families were structured as a patriarchy with a father or male father figure as the primary earner, and he was typically more educated than the female. What is consistent across the family background of all of the students is the presence of a strong work ethic and a high value placed on education that was promoted by both parents. These are the values that our respondents were exposed to and that affected their decisions to pursue an advanced education and Ph.D. degree.

Another influential factor mentioned by respondents (6/10) was previous work or volunteer experiences. These provided respondents with a clear vision of their current limitations with regard to reaching higher career goals, and illustrated the advantage of securing an advanced degree to be able to achieve them. Work and volunteer opportunities also provided students with first hand experiences regarding community needs, the plight of disadvantaged groups and the need for change or advocacy. For example, although all respondents are pursuing education to get a job and career, some are also seeking it to make the world a better place.

Theories of rational choice would argue that self-interested individuals would pursue education (including seeking an advanced degree) based on an economic calculation (i.e., the investment of time and money to get the degree results in a higher payout than other options including, not making those investments). But theories of community need and altruism (both of which are other-oriented motivations), also play a part in the decisions of our participants. Public service motivation theories (PSM) (Perry & Wise, 1990), may help to explain why a fair number of our study respondents view social improvements as a part of their motivation to seek out a public administration career. Defined as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations,” PSM evolves from the



emotional, rational and normative motives of an individual to fulfill societal expectations (Perry & Wise, 1990; 368). The self-selection of respondents to a PhD program in public administration and management helps us to better understand the simultaneous presence of altruistic motives driven by emotions or compassion, socio-obligatory motives driven by normative expectations, and the instrumental motives driven by rational utility-maximization behavior.

Economic downturns and cultural traditions also affected the decision for some of our respondents to pursue a Ph.D. degree abroad. A respondent from South Korea, noted that he was seeking an advanced degree to be able withstand economic downturns. A U.S. education was also seen as helpful for prestige and reducing class-based discrimination. Similarly, our respondent from Thailand found that the need to stay competitive and economically viable was a strong reason for pursuing a career path that included an advanced degree.

Religion was also a shaping factor in selecting a career that could return benefits to society through knowledge sharing and reducing societal inequalities (4/10). Only two respondents mentioned professional associations as playing any part in shaping their career choices. Three respondents identified advisors, mentors or other influential persons as having influenced their choice of career or the pursuit of higher education.

In sum, our respondents noted the importance of family, mentors or advisors, job security, work and volunteer experiences, religion, and making a contribution to society as having influenced their decision to pursue an advanced degree. Theoretically, each of these can have implications for associations. For example, it is clear that family values significantly shape their children's attitudes and decision making as it relates to education and a choice of career. For membership associations, therefore, the precursor to recruiting members may rest on

strategies that target the family. Membership models that are broad and family-based may be worth considering. This may include invitations to association events, hosting social events for the families and children of association members, or addressing topics of interest that go beyond the association member.

Work and volunteer experiences also helped to shape career pursuits. Here, associations may wish to partner with their member employers by conducting workshops holding events at relevant workplaces. Opportunities for career growth and the cultivation of mentors may also be useful for bringing associations to arenas where the cultivation of new memberships may be found. All of these activities may be based on theories associated with the acquisition of instrumental payoffs including career advancement, training, and certifications.

Faith and religion also had an effect on our respondents' choice to pursue a career in public administration. These motivations are consistent with helping others or giving back to an impoverished community. Here, associations may wish to offer volunteering opportunities that result in improvements to local or global communities in need. The desire for meaningful involvement is consistent with theories of stewardship, altruism and philanthropy. Many professional associations already dedicate their time and effort to offer such opportunities.

Examples include:

- The Hispanic National Bar Association established an initiative to provide pro bono legal services to veterans and their families
- The National Industries for the Blind: Volunteers provide career support to individuals who are blind.
- The Florida Realtors Education Foundation, Inc. provided local students with scholarships to pursue college education to address educational debt problem
- The American Academy of Ophthalmology: Volunteers help provide access to eye care for the medically underserved.

- The Iowa Dental Association: Volunteers serve as advocates for programs to provide dental services to low income families. (Associations Matter, 2012).

Finally, almost all of our respondents intend to pursue a career that will eventually lead them back to their home country. Associations will want to find ways to ensure that members are retained after returning to those regions. Establishing local affiliates or partnering with established organizations to expand networks are two avenues that might be pursued. These efforts are consistent with theories of networks and collaboration, all of which may result in higher levels of social capital, affiliation and bonding.

## **Interviews**

Our interviews showed that respondents across all countries are familiar with clubs and groups in their communities. Thus, joining and group socialization processes are common practices. However, only four of the 12 participants had held membership in a professional association in their home country. The problem of awareness and visibility to young people is one that associations may wish to address. Providing education about associations in schools, sponsoring hobby clubs or supporting sporting events that youth already participate in are possible opportunities.

Most of our study respondents who were members of professional associations in their home countries were acquainted with them through graduate school advisors or faculty mentors. Professional associations may wish to establish even stronger connections with graduate school programs to further cultivate these faculty liaisons. Graduate programs can also serve as venues for information outreach about associations at seminars, workshops, and the like. The participation of associations in university exhibitions and career center events can also be the means for increasing student awareness.

Our respondents joined a professional association in the U.S. to a large extent, because it was a requirement of their academic program. However, the choice of association although left to the student to decide, was heavily influenced by faculty members. One limitation of our study is that our sample is drawn from only one Ph.D. program. Whether a requirement to hold membership in a professional association is standard for graduate programs is not known. However, professional associations may wish to work with university professional degree programs to help ensure that membership is viewed as an integral part of an innovative curriculum. This can help to build an international membership in associations in the U.S., and also serve to result in memberships abroad as international students return to their home countries with an established professional group identity and set of norms that includes joining.

Theories of social capital suggest that bonding matters for organizational affiliation and loyalty to increase. In the early stages of membership, however, newcomers may not feel much of a bond. Professional associations should consider carefully what they do to welcome new members and make conscious efforts to bring them together. This can be done through mentoring, team-building activities, or other strategies. Our respondents offered advice that included targeting events to students and other professional newcomers at conferences, seminars and other meetings.

A comparison between home country and U.S. associations showed that respondents thought that there were more face-to-face opportunities to make friends and professional connections at home than in the U.S. Associations in the U.S., however, were viewed as being more organized and sharing information via technology was seen as superior in U.S. associations. The selective benefits that respondents valued most about their memberships included current information, regular updates, access to new developments, publications, job

openings, funding and research opportunities and access to other members. Being “the hub” for up-to-date information is beneficial for associations to be valued and relevant to members.

Research has shown that volunteering also increases bonding among individuals. However, it is well established that more people choose to volunteer in charitable organizations than in professional associations (Gazley & Dignam, 2008). Only four of our 12 respondents volunteered for activities in their professional associations. Nonetheless, those who did said that the experience was positive and helped to strengthen their attitudes towards membership in their association. The majority of our respondents also expressed an interest in volunteering for their professional association. Consequently, our analysis suggests that there is a latent pool of volunteers willing to be involved, but lacking either a direct invitation to volunteer or information about volunteering opportunities, so the pool remains untapped.

When comparing volunteering for a charitable nonprofit with association volunteering, our respondents did not see a direct link to social benefits by volunteering in their association. Many young people seeking public administration careers are drawn to the field in order to “make a difference” or serve those in need. To the extent that association volunteering can tailor some activities to those purposes may be useful. Such activities, however, should be combined with opportunities to obtain new knowledge, new skills and make new professional connections. Time constraints may prevent respondents from volunteering and we do not wish to overstate the potential for building commitment in an association by offering opportunities to volunteer for social causes. Clearly, our evidence suggests that respondents are most likely to be moved by career and instrumental motivations. Nonetheless, in the public service and in other “helping professions” there is usually a concern for the socially disadvantaged and communities in need.

When we reviewed the volunteering activities identified by ASAE (2007) survey respondents, we found that the recruitment of new members, serving on committees, and mentoring, coaching or tutoring were the most prevalent activities offered to young members by associations. In our interviews, respondents said that they would like to mentor, coach or tutor others, help organize a conference, and or review papers. These findings suggest that there is some overlap between what is currently being offered by associations and what is desired. Research suggests that volunteers usually stop their service because of unsatisfactory experiences, a mismatch of assignments, or a significant life change. Associations appear to be doing a good job of making assignments but they will want to continue to ensure that activities are interesting and varied to satisfy a range of desires.

When we compared the motivations to volunteer for a professional association with those for general nonprofits, we see patterns in our participants' responses that have been shown in previous studies. Using the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) of Clary and Snyder (1991), we found that among the six types of motivations classified by the instrument, association volunteering is motivated by the categories of understanding, social, career and enhancement. In general volunteering, however, motives are more likely to be driven by values and protective motivations. We do not conclude, however, that associational volunteering can be driven only by career-related motivations, or that general volunteering is purely altruistic. In a December 18, 2013 article by Rominiecki, published in ASAE's InTouch newsletter, the author discussed the importance of mission as a guiding light for professional associations in managing their volunteer resources. Our respondents are moved by a variety of motivations and it will be up to associations to find the right mix of activities or partnerships that can serve to meet the needs of their volunteers.

Although we found some cultural variations with regard to volunteering motivations, (i.e., those from African nations were more likely to be motivated by social causes, compared to China or Thailand), the limitations of our small sample size means that we cannot generalize our findings. Additional research with larger samples drawn from each of the countries represented would be useful for more systematically exploring potential cultural differences that can impact membership volunteering.

## **Focus Groups**

The four questions used in our focus groups considered the factors for success and what was needed for a competitive edge in the profession in several countries and specific benefits and opportunities that professional associations might provide to potential or current members.

Personal connection was reported by focus group members as being most important for achieving professional success among the countries in our sample. This finding is relevant to professional membership associations as they should have a strong advantage in connecting well established people in the field with new professionals. Building on existing capacities and utilizing networks to link established individuals and new pools of talent is likely to be a wise investment of time and effort. These networks should be used to ensure growth and sustainability in their memberships.

Likewise, the existence of the network of professionals and their capacities (currently tapped and/or untapped), can help to set up continuity of knowledge development for professionals within the associations and in the respective association fields. Our respondents also noted the importance of certification (3/12) and hands-on experiences (3/12) to success in their countries. Various models of career development already exist for helping members in these

areas. These include on-the-job training, internships and sponsoring volunteering or other activities that provide for the acquisition of the hours or skills necessary for members to gain credentials. Collective interests and selective benefits are both enhanced in these pursuits.

Our second focus group question asked respondents to discuss the essentials needed to be competitive in a professional career in their home countries. Respondents mentioned education (6/12), university rankings (6/12), certifications (2/12), and networks (2/12) among their top choices. Professional associations cannot directly provide a university education but they can affect university rankings by their activities and associations with universities. Joint projects between universities with top programs in their fields or professions can help to create a bridge between young professionals wanting to receive advanced degrees, prestigious university programs, and associations. Models here may include funding through competitive scholarships (for example), guest speakers, field trips, courses or webinar trainings.

The third and fourth questions asked the focus group participants to discuss specific benefits and opportunities that professional associations could provide to help members succeed in their professions. Opportunities to network had the highest ranking with five of the 12 respondents ranking it first. Professional associations use conferences and meetings to provide these opportunities face-to-face, and technology offers the means to do so virtually.

Mentoring and tutoring were also ranked first and second by several focus group respondents. In today's business environment, many organizations recognize the benefits of mentoring and have used it as a key learning tool to pass on values, and skills, and as an employee retaining strategy (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Cotton 1999). The use of mentoring has been associated with many positive organizational outcomes including



higher retention and employee satisfaction (e.g., Forret & de Janasz, 2005, Payne & Huffman, 2005). Mentoring is a “relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé’s career” (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5). Although learning occurs in many other types of interpersonal relationships, mentoring is unique in a sense that this relationship focuses on career advancement and development of professionalism.

Mentoring is related to networking because while the latter serves to provide opportunities for people to meet or be introduced to one another, mentoring builds on these introductions by facilitating ongoing interactions (either face to face or virtually). One outcome of successful mentoring is likely to be the establishment of stronger bonds. For association members, conferences, exhibitions and meetings are avenues to establish and develop networks and to meet potential members.

Opening opportunities was ranked second by six of the 12 focus group respondents. Here people mentioned travel and funding for research opportunities, job prospects and continuous education. The continuous flow of information and updates about professional initiatives, achievements and advocacy efforts are also highly ranked by focus group respondents. These benefits are probably the least costly for a professional association to offer since they very likely already exist. Nonetheless, associations will want to consider the formats they use and how engaging the material is for the user. Although not every member is likely to contact the association website on a daily, or even a weekly basis, short, brief, continuously updated information can draw in more frequent users. Our findings suggest that access to current information is an important factor for members in deciding whether to renew or discontinue one’s membership status.

## Implications and Conclusion

In this project, we asked: How can professional membership associations provide meaningful value for their members? Based on our findings and analyses, we believe that there are several implications for action for associations as they seek to create new and innovative models to engage members across the globe. Among these are:

1) Young professionals at the start of their careers believe that joining an association is viewed positively by others and can help them in their professions.

The implication of this finding is that recruitment should be easier than if the reputation was not favorable.

2) Young people from all cultures are influenced in their professional choices by family, faculty members, and work and volunteering experiences. They have little knowledge of professional associations prior to graduate school.

The implications are that associations should target family, faculty and workplaces to share their messages about memberships and benefits.

3) Young people value their membership association benefits, and in particular, they value current information, conferences, and networking.

The implications are that associations should ensure that they remain hubs of knowledge and offer opportunities for members to meet and share information.

4) Young people are interested in volunteering for their associations for career related benefits but may also be motivated to volunteer for social causes.

The implications include reviewing current volunteer opportunities to consider the needs that each opportunity helps to fulfill.

In Table 2: we summarize some of the other concerns raised by respondents in our study. We also offer some strategies for associations to consider. In Figures 11 and 12 we have two

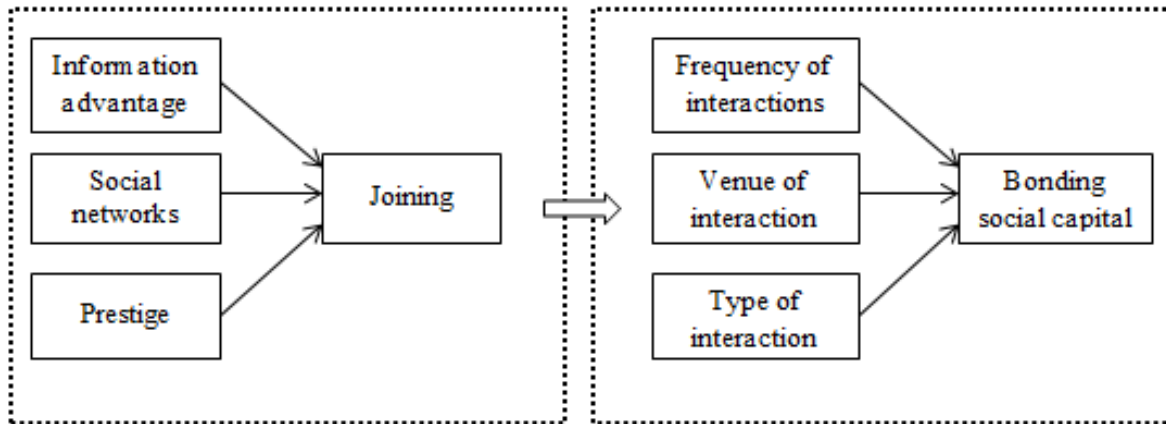
models that illustrate connections between our findings and the creation of social capital. These are likewise offered for the consideration of associations.

**Table 2: Respondents’ concerns**

<b>Findings:</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
Infrequency of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aside from yearly national conferences, professional associations are encouraged to hold more smaller and targeted events</li> </ul>
Activities are not targeted to students or new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer “new member” socializing events</li> <li>• Match senior and new members by their interests or geographical regions</li> </ul>
Lack of local events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More local events are suggested for those who have limited time and funds to attend national or international conferences or meetings</li> <li>• Create or activate defunct local chapters</li> <li>• Become active in countries that associations are not currently serving</li> </ul>
Mandatory joining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to universities and professional program faculty</li> <li>• Participate in university career fairs, workshops</li> </ul>

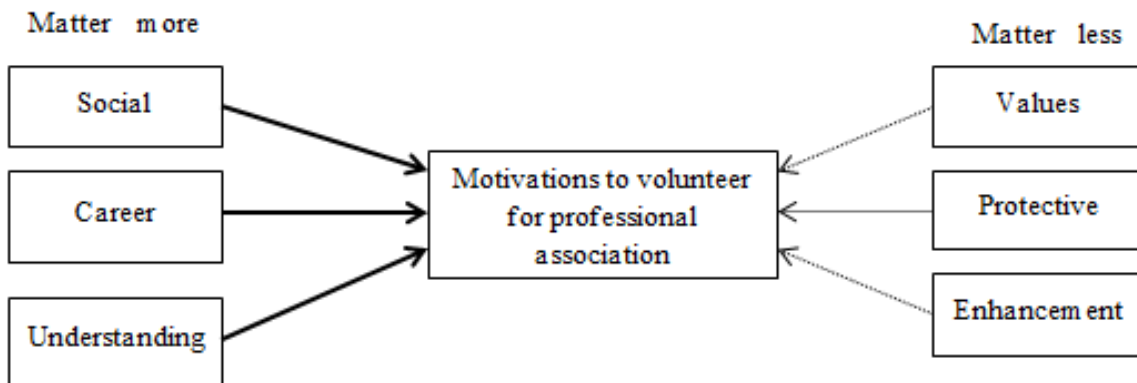
In Figure 11 we present a model that depicts the relationship between the selective benefits that are valued by members, joining an association, interactions and social capital. The connections among these variables are shown below.

**Figure 11. Model of affiliation: Motivations to join and interactions and bonding**



As shown in Figure 11, there are two consecutive steps that are taken to link joining to bonding. In the left side of the model are the major factors that were identified by our respondents as reasons to join a professional association. Information, networks, and the prestige associated with belonging to an association all played a part in our respondents' choice of a professional association. Joining is then linked to bonding through the interactions most often mentioned by our respondents. These include the frequency of interactions, the place or venue of interaction, and the type of interaction (which included both face-to-face and web based). Bonding social capital, as shown on the right hand side of the model, flows from attention to each of the interaction factors.

**Figure 12. Model of engagement: Motivations to volunteer (adapted from the VFI)**



In Figure 12 we identify how the six categories of volunteer motivations found in the VFI classification (Clary, et al., 1992), were ranked and prioritized by our respondents. As the bold arrows show, in volunteering for professional associations our respondents are overwhelmingly motivated by social and instrumental reasons including networking, gaining career and professional experiences, learning new knowledge and honing existing skill sets. On the other hand, as shown by the dotted arrows, motivations that relate to altruism (social), personal issues (protective), and psychological growth (enhancement), mattered less to our respondents with regard to associational volunteering. A consideration of these motivations and member interests in volunteering should be useful for associations as they design opportunities for the engagement of their members.

## **Conclusion**

Meaningful involvement is a wave of the future that has already arrived. The new generation of Millennials are often depicted as individualized and disinterested (Wolfe, 2006). In fact, newer research suggests that they are simply more selective in how they will dedicate their time and efforts (Dalton, 2009). Our findings show that associations have reason to be optimistic

about attracting and retaining young, international members. Every year more international students come to the U.S. to begin graduate studies in professional programs. Associations already have a good reputation among these newcomers. By tending to their needs and making them feel welcome, a strong base can be created. Not surprisingly, international students would like to see more attention placed on them as they become part of the scientific community.

Although we have not explored the possibilities here, socialization opportunities using technology is clearly necessary to reach busy professionals across the globe. Technology can allow young professionals who cannot attend a conference to stay connected and updated in the field. Weak ties are a type of connection that can extend relationships beyond an immediate circle of interaction (Granovetter, 1973; Leonard & Onyx, 2003). There will be benefits for organizations that pursue frequent exchanges of new and current information, and expose their members to up-to-date career opportunities. Professional associations can be facilitators in these processes.

Our research also suggests that young people join and are motivated by a variety of factors. Among these are instrumental motivations of career development, altruistic motivations and social obligations, and motivations addressing personal issues such as self-sufficiency and self-actualization (Dicke & Saitgalina, 2011). Offering opportunities to satisfy these motivations is likely to be helpful for associations in attracting and keeping members happy. These opportunities can include development and certification programs, and activities that increase members' hands-on and practical experiences.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire

#### Interview questions attempting to gain an understanding of the perceptions of the participants

*First, let us start with some demographic background questions:*

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What country are you from?
4. Have you always lived in the country you were born in? If not, what is the country you were mainly raised in?

(Regions for further categorization: North America, South or Central America, Europe, Asia/Pacific Rim, Australia/New Zealand, Middle East, Africa)

*Now, let me ask you about some of your cultural background aspects:*

5. **What is the culture of joining in your country?** Specifically, Are there many clubs and groups and other opportunities for joining and membership in your country? What are the socialization opportunities in your country?

*Now, I have a few questions about your family background*

6. Were you raised by both your father and mother? If No, what was the living arrangement like in your family?
7. What are your parents' occupational careers?
8. What is the highest education degree that your parents have?
9. Is career important in your family?
10. Was it expected in your family for you to pursue a high level professional degree?
11. Were you encouraged by anyone else outside your family to pursue a high level professional degree?
12. Have you had a lot of opportunities for career development in your country?
13. Why are you pursuing your Ph.D.?

How do you see your future career path after attaining your Ph.D. degree? In other words what do you want to do in the future?

14. What made you interested in having a professional career?

Now, there are professional membership associations that are created to promote and improve the quality of lines of business, occupation or profession. I want to ask you a few questions about whether you have any prior experience with these associations in your home country.

15. Did you or do you still belong to any professional association in your country? What are those?
16. Are there many professional associations in your country? Do you know how many are there?
17. If No, were you aware of any professional associations? Have you heard about any of them in your home country? Do you know what do they usually do?
18. If No, why haven't you been a member? Do you think they are popular to join in your home country?
19. If Yes, How did you learn about your professional association in your country?
20. If Yes, were you satisfied with your membership? What was good/bad about it?
21. If Yes, have you taken any active part in participating at your professional association? (For example, did you volunteer, attend conferences, trainings, webinars, received journal subscriptions, visited their website)
22. Do you or did you have any family members, friends, colleagues in your home country who belong to a professional association?

Now let us turn to your experience with professional associations here in the U.S.

23. Are you a member of a professional association in the U.S.? To how many professional associations do you belong? What are those?
24. Why did you join every particular professional association?
25. If Yes to 24, do you list your memberships on your resume? Why Yes or No?
26. If Yes to 24, how often do you meet other members in your professional membership associations?
27. Have you made any new friends or professional connections in your membership association?
28. What value does your professional membership bring to you?
29. What are the benefits of your professional membership association that you value the most?
30. How often do you use your membership benefits? What are the benefits that you used more often?
31. Do you think you are getting value for your money from your membership in the professional association? Why Yes, why No?

32. How often do you go on your professional association website? Why do you go to their website? What kind of information are you looking for?
33. How often do you read their newsletters?
34. Are you connected to any other groups in your profession because of your membership?
35. What effect do you think your membership has on your professional career?
36. Where do you get your primary information about your profession or career? Is it your professional association or something else? Please, list your resources
37. **Please rate the following** on the Likert scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is “Strongly Disagree” and 5 is “Strongly Agree” **“Would you agree that ...”**:

#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	My professional membership association means very little to me					
2	I think about my professional membership association at least once a week					
3	My professional membership association is an important part of my life					
4	I think professional membership associations are pretty useless					
5	I think that my association is helping to make my profession stronger					

38. Generally, how would you compare your prior experience with professional associations in your home country with your current membership experience in the U.S.? *Now I have a few questions about your involvement with nonprofit organizations in general and with your professional associations:*

39. Have you ever volunteered through or for any nonprofit organization? Why Yes and why No? If Yes, what did you do?
40. If No to 39, have you thought about it?
41. If, Yes to 40, what type of volunteering activity would you prefer to carry out in a general nonprofit organization?
42. In general, what should happen to make you start volunteering for any nonprofit organization?
43. Do you or have you volunteered for your professional membership association? Why Yes and why No? If Yes, what did you do?

44. What should happen to make you start volunteering for your professional association?  
There are some volunteering opportunities that professional associations generally offer to their members such as to serve on a committee/board, speak/chair a conference panel, review papers for conference/publication, tutor/teach/mentor, etc.

45. If, yes, what type of volunteering activity would you prefer to carry out in your professional association?

46. Would you start volunteering if your professional association participated in a socially-important project (i.e., helping disadvantaged groups of population)? Why?

47. How do you perceive volunteering in a professional association as opposed to volunteering in a charitable organization (e.g., church)?

48. If Yes to 43, after volunteering on behalf of your (professional membership association name) how has your perception about the value of the membership changed?

Finally, I have two more questions about your decision to stay or leave your professional association:

49. Do you intend to renew your membership in the professional association? Why?

50. What new things could your association do that would make your membership more attractive?

51. Given your experience what would be one piece of advice that you would offer to people who run professional membership associations?

52. Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to share in the context of membership in professional associations?

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Questionnaire**

- 1) In most countries a graduate degree is expected for someone entering into a professional career. In your country is there anything else you need to be successful in your profession?
- 2) What is needed to have a competitive edge in securing a job in your profession in your country?
- 3) In general, what are the benefits, if any, of having professional or trade associations in your country?
- 4) What can a professional or trade association do to help you achieve success in your chosen profession?

## **Appendix C: Biography Solicitation Message**

Dear students:

Thank you again for participating in the focus group today. As was mentioned at the focus group we are asking you to submit a 2-page biography that should include information such as where you grew up (a large city—Dallas with millions of people in the area, or a small farming community—Krum with only 3,500 people), how long you lived there (I lived in Texas for 20 years), and background on your experiences, your country as it relates to your choice of a career, information about some of the industries that were important (i.e., in the area where I lived agriculture and automobile manufacturing were important industries...in addition, there was a university--or, maybe there was no university). I was influenced to seek a career in the university because...

This additional information will help us tell the story and to learn a little more about your life and influences (expectations, neighbors maybe, religious expectations that might have been important to your career choices, etc.). Any combination of things that you think are important in relation to professional or trade associations will also be helpful.