

# BERRY PROUD

Just five years after Berry was founded, the New York Stock Exchange fell almost 50 percent from its peak of the year before in what became known as the Panic of 1907. The national economic turmoil that ensued hindered donations to Berry and left the school almost penniless. Although destitute themselves, **Berry students stepped forward in this moment of crisis.**



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

Between semesters, they worked extra to provide Miss Berry with 71 envelopes containing \$1 each, about a day's wages. A group of recent graduates – the earliest from the Boys' Industrial School – joined in the effort and presented her with an additional purse of \$53.

No one student or new graduate could offer much, but collectively they made a gift that in today's wages would amount to more than \$5,000. This contribution did not resolve the school's financial burdens, but it demonstrated

convincingly that the students valued their Berry education.

Although Berry is blessed today with financial stability, alumni gifts remain a tangible indicator of institutional pride and affirmation. And not just the splendid ones that everyone notices. All of us appreciate the major gifts that change the face of Berry with new programs and buildings, but most of us do not have that capacity. It is important to understand that smaller gifts are significant in their own right. A gift of \$100,000 has the same monetary benefit as 1,000 gifts of \$100, but the 1,000 gifts show a breadth of interest and enthusiasm that one gift can never match. That is why philanthropic foundations and rating organizations (e.g., *US News & World Report*) pay attention to the *percentage* of alumni who make an annual gift as well as to the total dollars given.

## CONFERENCE STANDINGS

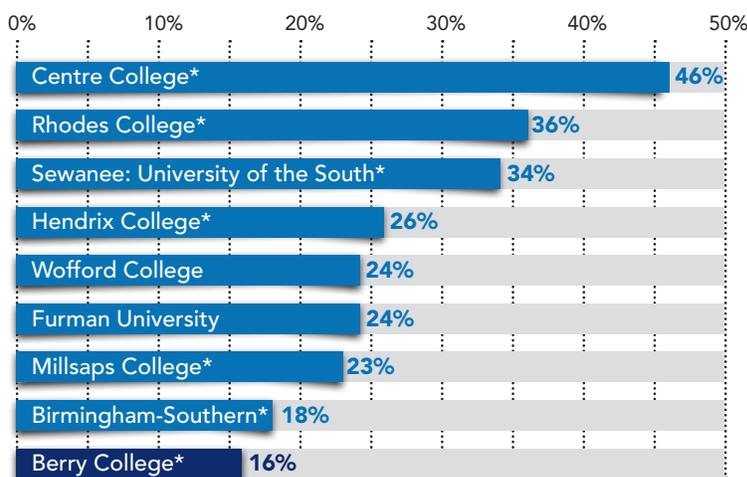
I will admit to feeling overtly competitive on matters related to Berry. It was hard not to be excited when the Vikings softball team earned the No. 1 national ranking midway through this spring season. Magnificent also has been the string of national championships (three in five years) by the Berry equestrian team in western saddle competition. And it was a splendid fall afternoon when the football team defeated Centre College in the last game of the 2016 season to clinch its first-ever conference championship.

You should not think that my competitive nature is limited to sporting endeavors. I am thrilled by the trumpeting excellence of sophomore Leif Atchley (see page 8) and the award-winning entrepreneurial pitch delivered by junior Josh Cutter and senior Chris Whitmire (see page 5). What a delight also to celebrate

the continuing success of forensics team members at the national championships.

That is why it rankles so when I look at the scoreboard regarding alumni annual giving. Berry lags behind our peer and aspirant list, including six other schools in the Southern Athletic Association.

## Alumni Annual Giving Rates



\*SAA institutions

The percentages shown are from numbers compiled by *US News & World Report*. It is difficult to know whether they represent a truly apples-to-apples comparison; some schools may use creative means to determine who is counted as a donor (numerator) relative to how many alumni are included in the base as a whole (denominator). It also is the case that schools with a historically affluent student base tend to have higher rates of alumni giving.

Even so, it is troubling that Berry should trail the others because Berry students have always been distinguished as much by their gratitude as by their work ethic. Visitors to campus regularly comment on the maturity of students and their sense of belonging and pride of place. They observe how adept students are at handling challenging responsibilities and praise their professionalism. In a curious way, students themselves do not always recognize how much they have accomplished, perhaps in part because the general level of engagement is so high at Berry and the fullness of an education of the head, heart and hands is so great. Visitors, however, are intrigued by the

Berry culture and often assume that the percentage of annual alumni giving must be especially high.

Why this is not the case is a puzzle. My own hunch is that we have not yet persuaded alumni of the substantial value of regular gifts, even those that seem ordinary in size.

#### WHY ALL GIFTS MATTER

Signature gifts are certainly needed when constructing a new theatre or endowing a major program such as the Berry Center for Integrity in Leadership. Many other initiatives, however, can be achieved with more modest gifts – initiatives that improve the campus experience generally or in a particular way but do not fit readily into the college’s regular budget given our commitment to curb the cost of tuition.

Recently, BerryFunder, the crowdfunding portal for Berry College, has served as the means for collecting many gifts to a specific end. In August 2016, 24 donors raised more than \$9,000 to purchase two pieces of technical equipment – a Vertical Laser XL and a Printronix Crawlbot – to increase the prototyping and production options for creative technologies student projects. Also in August, 35 donors provided more than \$3,100 to purchase Kindermusik materials for the South Rome Early Learning Center, a developmental program sponsored by Berry’s Charter School of Education and Human Sciences in partnership with Anna K. Davie Elementary School.

Additional Berry projects are posted regularly on the BerryFunder website ([www.berry.edu/funder](http://www.berry.edu/funder)), allowing alumni to choose for themselves how to direct their gifts. And many donors long have chosen to earmark their annual gifts for student scholarships or the Work Experience Program.

Regardless of personal preference about what to support, allow me to offer four reasons why I hope all alumni will consider a gift to Berry each and every year.

#### PARTICIPATION MATTERS

The average annual participation rate for alumni giving at our peer and aspirant schools is 30 percent, nearly double the rate for Berry. Observers might be inclined to think that alumni at these other schools are more satisfied than Berry graduates with their educational experience, but I find that hard to believe. Berry graduates typically have fond memories of their college experience, and it is time to affirm that through a pattern of participation.

#### CONSISTENCY MATTERS

Over a five-year span, more than 32 percent of Berry alumni give. Thus, the ability to double our rate of annual giving is entirely possible. All that is needed is annual attention. A new pattern could quickly be established if alumni would choose to make a gift annually to coincide with “Pennies for



## BE BERRY

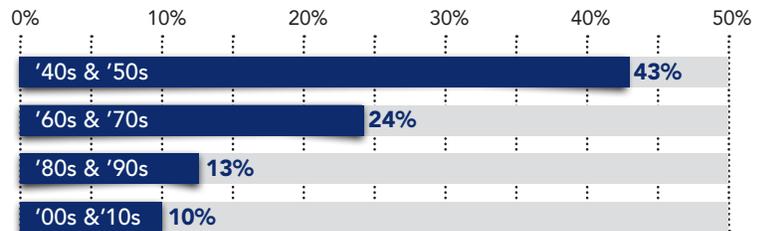
“A gift of \$100,000 has the same monetary benefit as 1,000 gifts of \$100, but the **1,000 gifts show a breadth of interest and enthusiasm** that one gift can never match.”

Martha” on Mountain Day or as part of their other year-end (December) giving.

#### RECENT GRADUATES MATTER

We know that alumni giving rates vary with age and stage of life and that Berry’s alumni base is growing younger.

#### Berry Alumni Participation by Graduation Decades



One-quarter of Berry’s living alumni have graduated in the 10 years since 2007. That may explain, in part, why Berry’s alumni giving rate has decreased in recent years; it was 24 percent in 2011-12, for example. Recent alumni are in the midst of starting their careers and families. Some are still paying on their college loans. And yet, recent graduates also have fresh memories of their college experience and can appreciate the difference that targeted gifts can make. Even in the first years after Berry, most graduates can afford a small gift to help support a particular project for the students following close behind.

#### PRIDE MATTERS

Brenda and I graduated from Wake Forest University decades ago, and our degrees have functioned much like a great “growth stock” ever since. The university is better now in many ways than when we attended, but we are certainly grateful for having received a first-rate educational experience during our years there and acknowledge that experience with regular gifts. Wake Forest met our needs, prepared us for our adult lives and helped us become better people.

In the same way, Berry has changed dramatically since the days of the Panic of 1907. It was meaningful and special in the lives of those who graduated decades ago, yet its reputation continues to grow and its offerings improve with time. Berry’s trajectory is as remarkable as its enduring character and identity.

In the last several years, Berry students have added a new

cheer to their repertoire at sporting and other events that emphasizes the power and excitement of pulling together to make Berry great. Chanting and motioning together, they demonstrate, “We all row!”

If you, like them, are Berry proud, I invite you to row with us by becoming a regular annual donor. **B**