

Tracking Alumni:

Strategies for Collecting and Updating Personal and Professional Information

Short Answer Research Brief • July 31, 2008

**RESEARCH
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I. METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Sources Used

- The Advisory Board's internal and online (www.advisory.com) research libraries
- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) <http://www.eric.ed.gov>
- The Chronicle of Higher Education <http://chronicle.com>
- Inside Higher Ed www.insidehighered.com
- Internet, via search engines and multiple Web sites, including:
 - <http://www.imodules.com/s/539/main.aspx?sid=539&pgid=440>
 - <http://www.blackbaud.com/>
 - <http://www.nacweb.org/default.asp>
 - <http://www.harrisconnect.com/>
 - <http://www.sungardhe.com/>

Research Parameters

- As requested, the Council looked to the member's peer institutions when researching systems for tracking alumni information. However, research revealed that these universities often employ similar tactics and strategies to track alumni data as those used by the member. After consulting the member university, the Council decided to expand its research to include two institutions with larger residential populations and higher alumni giving rates to provide a broader spectrum of alumni tracking methods.

I. METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Institution	Location	Total/ Undergrad. Enrollment	Classification	Average Alumni Giving Rate	Overall Graduation Rate	U.S. News & World Report Ranking
Institution A	ME	1,734 (All undergrad.)	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts and Sciences	55%	92%	Liberal Arts College, Top 10
Institution B	CO	1,998/1,970	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts and Sciences	33%	84%	Liberal Arts College, Top 30
Institution C	TN	12,390/10,204	Public; Doctoral/ Research	6%	40%	National University, Fourth Tier
Institution B	FL	25,325/21,082	Public; High Research	2%	37%	National University, Fourth Tier
Institution B	TX	34,334/27,400	Public; High Research	5%	42%	National University, Fourth Tier
Institution B	TX	24,825/19,205	Public; High Research	3%	42%	National University, Fourth Tier
Institution C	OR	24,254/17,998	Public; Doctoral/ Research	5%	37%	National University, Third Tier

Notes: All information from the National Center for Education Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov>) and U.S. News & World Report (<http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com>).

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Project Challenge

A large, public research university located in the South approached the Student Affairs Leadership Council with the following question:

What strategies are peer institutions using to gather and update biographical and employment data from alumni?

Introduction

With the vast majority of the student population commuting to campus and attending part-time, the member university struggles to collect personal and professional information from alumni. In an effort to address this issue and, ultimately, improve career preparation, placement, and success, the administration at this large, public university has tasked the Student Affairs Leadership Council with identifying efficient systems for tracking alumni data. The member is particularly interested in innovative methods for garnering graduate contact (e.g., home address and phone number) and employment information (e.g., company and position title).

Colleges and universities across the nation face similar challenges in gathering this type of data from alumni and former students. The Council found that administrators in both alumni offices and career centers all stress the difficulty of obtaining alumni information and maintaining a useful database. Despite these common frustrations, each institution contacted was able to share successful outreach practices for connecting with alumni. These insights are profiled on the following pages.

Key Observations and Recommendations

- 1. The highest alumni response rate is achieved through a multi-pronged outreach campaign.** Marketing to alumni through several channels (e.g., mail, email, phone, etc.) reaches a broad audience and provides alumni with flexibility of response.
- 2. Capitalize on major alumni events and announcements as a means of collecting alumni information.** In addition to contacting alumni for the specific purpose of updating biographical information (e.g., every five years to create a print directory), many colleges and universities take advantage of traditional alumni events (e.g., homecoming, reunions, etc.) to solicit graduates to provide current data. Most contacts note that every communication, whether an invitation to a reception or a donation solicitation, includes a request for updated information.
- 3. Institutions with the most effective alumni outreach programs and data storing systems have a central office charged with both tasks.** When multiple offices reach out to alumni, a college or university runs the risk of over-contacting graduates, which often leads to their unwillingness to participate in data update requests, fundraising campaigns, or volunteering events. Contacts stress that designating one central office to collect and maintain alumni data alleviates the common issue many institutions face of duplicating campus resources. It should be noted that contact can come from multiple offices, but all communication should first be coordinated through one central office, such as Alumni Affairs. Institutions with decentralized structures emphasize that internal communication between departments is essential to avoid the aforementioned problem of over-contacting, and thus, alienating alumni.

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations and Recommendations (Cont'd)

4. **All institutions profiled either contract with an outside software provider for the alumni database (and its affiliated online directory) or develop homegrown automated systems.** Online databases, as opposed to paper-based systems, organize data efficiently, provide a means by which to easily search and pull data points, and allow for frequent data updates, ensuring accurate and current information.
5. **It is common for institutions to expand their definition of “alumni” to include former students, parents, and donors.** Colleges and universities generally track alumni for the purposes of soliciting donations and encouraging participation in events, such as career fairs and alumni receptions. It is important to recognize that, in addition to graduates, there are other groups connected with an institution that should also be invited to take part in these activities. Former students (those who matriculated but did not graduate), parents of current students and graduates, and donors are all great resources for building a career advisory network or a stronger donor base. Including these cohorts under the umbrella of “alumni” allows many institutions to increase attendance at events and improve the average alumni giving rate.
6. **Universities, amid internal privacy concerns, collect salary ranges instead of exact figures.**

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Classifying Alumni: *Who's included in the database?*

The table below indicates how each institution defines "alumni." While some follow the traditional method of only tracking students who have graduated from the school, other institutions have broadened the definition to account for former students (i.e., those who attended the college or university, but did not graduate). Many schools also include friends of the institution (e.g., donors and parents) as well as current students in the alumni database. With the exception of Institution A, which automatically tracks all graduates, parents, donors, and students (current and former), those who meet the criteria outlined below must request to join their alma mater's alumni association or be included in the database.

Constituents	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C	Institution D	Institution E	Institution F	Institution G
Graduates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Former Students (non-graduates)	✓		Completed a minimum of one semester of coursework	Completed a minimum of two semesters of coursework	Completed a minimum of three semesters of coursework	✓	
Friends (e.g., donors, parents)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Current Students	Automatically tracked upon matriculation				✓	✓	

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Common Forms of Outreach

While outreach varies by institution, there are several methods that all of the colleges and universities profiled use to connect with alumni. The following table highlights these strategies and provides a brief overview of each.

Strategy	Overview of Strategy
Mailings	Whether an invitation to a reception or a donation solicitation, mailings typically include a request for updated biographical information (i.e., personal and professional contact data). While this is the most common method of updating alumni data through the mail, contacts note that it is also effective to send targeted mailings (e.g., reunion announcements to a specific class) with the explicit purpose of asking alumni to provide current contact information.
Email	Similar to traditional mailings, colleges and universities communicate with alumni via email to remind them to update their biographical information when necessary (e.g., after moving or changing jobs). Most contacts report that the institution connects with alumni through personalized emails (as opposed to generic mass messages).
Web site	Maintaining an up-to-date alumni Web site makes it relatively easy for graduates to join the alumni association, provide the institution with accurate biographical information, or stay informed about upcoming events and reunions.
Phonathon	While some institutions conduct phonathons for the explicit purpose of garnering updated contact information, it is common for colleges and universities to have student callers review the biographical data on file for a particular alum when soliciting donations during a capital campaign, for example.
Alumni Magazine	All colleges and universities contacted indicate that an alumni magazine's "Class Notes" section is an effective tool for persuading alumni to update their contact information. Institutions also include reminders throughout the magazine, encouraging alumni to revise any out-of-date biographical data.
Alumni Association Chapters	In order to facilitate connections between graduates and their alma mater, alumni offices typically organize affinity groups and regional chapters of the alumni association. Contacts note that providing graduates with various ways to stay engaged is key to collecting personal and professional information.

During the course of research, the Council uncovered numerous examples of institutions that have brought unique twists to the traditional strategies discussed above. These, and other more innovative methods of outreach, are profiled in depth in section III of this brief.

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Information Collected

Regardless of the outreach method employed, each institution has specific data points they collect. The table below indicates the information that each college and university requests from alumni and former students.

Data Requested	Inst. A	Inst. B	Inst. C	Inst. D	Inst. E	Inst. F	Inst. G
<i>Professional</i>							
Employer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Industry	✓						
Position Title	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Business Address	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Home Address	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Phone Number	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Mobile Phone Number							✓
Professional Email Address							
Professional Title							✓
Location of Job		✓					✓
Start Date							✓
Graduate's School	✓						✓
<i>Personal</i>							
Full Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Home Address	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Email Address	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phone Number	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Current Phone	✓						
Marital Status	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Spouse's Name				✓			
Age of Children	✓	✓					
Current and Past Hobbies	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Current and Past Activities/Interests	✓			✓		✓	

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Storing Alumni Biographical Information: *Databases and Online Directories*

Perhaps as important as collecting alumni biographical data is effectively organizing and storing the information. All institutions contacted report using two tools to house alumni contact information: a database and an online directory. While some colleges and universities choose to develop homegrown systems, it is common for institutions to contract with outside vendors. The following table outlines the system each college and university uses to organize alumni data.

Product	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C	Institution D	Institution E	Institution F	Institution G
The Raiser's Edge (Blackbaud)	✓			✓		✓	
NetCommunity (Blackbaud)	✓			✓		✓	
Banner Advancement (SunGard)			✓		✓		
iModules (iMOC)			✓		✓		
IAC (IAC)					✓		
In-house Developed Database and Directory		✓					✓

The Raiser's Edge and NetCommunity: Each developed by Blackbaud, Inc., these products have separate functions, but work together to provide a college or university with a comprehensive database system. Specifically, The Raiser's Edge database software divides records into 13 categories, one of which is explicitly for employment information. NetCommunity interacts with the database to allow any alumnus or former student to personally update their information online. This enables the institution to have access to current contact information in real time. Some contacts described the tool as a "less risqué version of Facebook."

Banner Advancement: SunGard Data Systems, Inc.'s software provides internet access to staff, alumni, and other friends of the institution, enabling donors to give easily to the school as well as allowing alumni to keep in touch with former classmates. Moreover, Banner Advancement gives alumni relations and development staff quick access to complete alumni and donor information. Contacts explain that the system offers an institution the ability to avoid outreach overlap, as all appropriate internal divisions have access to the data.

iModules: Much like the products described above, iModules' Web-based software allows colleges and universities to maintain connections with alumni and other constituents. Many contacts note that their institution originally used Internet Association Corporation (IAC), but carried their contract over to iModules when the two companies merged in September, 2007.

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Storing Alumni Biographical Information (Cont'd)

inCircle: An online networking community developed by Stanford students, inCircle is very similar to Web sites like Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn, and MySpace. At Institution E, the only profiled institution that currently uses the service, all alumni as well as any members of the [Institution E] Alumni Organization are able to create inCircle profiles. According to contacts, Institution E's inCircle serves as an online directory and a career networking community. Current students who are paying members of the Student Alumni Connection also have access to the service.

Note: The offices of alumni relations and career services at many institutions create profiles on the aforementioned social networking sites and "friend" alumni. Contacts state that this is an easy and cost-effective way of connecting with recent graduates, as many are already members of these free online services.

Homegrown Systems: Institutions B and G are the only schools contacted that currently use internally developed databases and online directories. Institution A converted to Blackbaud from a homegrown database seven years ago, citing increased capabilities as the main reason for the switch.

Harris Print Directory and Online Application: While more common before the widespread use of online databases, some colleges and universities continue to contract with the Harris Publishing Company to create a paper-based directory. Updated only once every five years, institutions contacted—that currently or previously used Harris—comment that an online database is a far more efficient method for storing alumni information. One contact notes, "With Harris, you lose that timeliness of a live, online directory. By the time you actually get the print directory back, it can be months since the alumni responded. The information is no longer relevant."

In order to address this issue and compete with vendors who offer online tools, Harris has developed Community Connection, an application that links a college or university to their alumni on Facebook. This bridge enables an institution to remain in touch with graduates and former students, keeping them informed about community news, events, and activities. Community Connection also allows alumni to create a profile, upload and maintain a resume, and stay connected with other graduates and with the institution. Moreover, the application enables a college or university to automatically update any information pulled from an alumnus' Facebook profile.

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION A

Introduction:

At this small liberal arts college in Maine, maintaining close ties with alumni and former students is an institutional priority. This is illustrated by Institution A's policy of beginning to compile biographical information for each student on the first day of classes. Initiating data collection at this point allows the college to gather a significant amount of information (e.g., academic major and participation in student organizations) about current students throughout their undergraduate careers. This data is then used to build an initial alumni profile for each student upon graduation. Institution A has found that this is an effective method for tracking alumni because the system not only provides the college with a comprehensive set of data for each graduate, but it also enables Alumni Relations to simply request that alumni *update* biographical profiles as opposed to provide all of their personal, professional, and academic information. (This is a tactic that other institutions have found increases data request response rates.) Following a student's graduation, access to their alumni profile is restricted primarily to staff in the Alumni Relations and the Planning & Development offices. (The Career Planning Center maintains separate records.)

Alumni Specific Database: *PolarNet*

PolarNet is a searchable online community that connects alumni with students and with one another. The software application is marketed by Blackbaud as "NetCommunity," but personalized by Institution A after the college's mascot: the polar bear. Because the system is linked to the alumni database, PolarNet profile information is the same as the data the college collects on each student throughout their time at Institution A (see above). Thus, Alumni Relations merely asks PolarNet users to provide updated information at the time of membership (graduation) and periodically when necessary (e.g., change of address or employment status). Contacts note that only students and alumni who join this network can see the profiles of other members. (Additionally, members can see the names and class year of non-members).

Cost of PolarNet:

Including software, database training, and consulting fees, contacts estimate that the college invested over \$400,000 into the Blackbaud product. While this is of substantial cost to a college with only 1,700 students, administrators believe that the investment will more than pay for itself as a result of increased alumni outreach and subsequent donations. Evidence of the success of the new system can be seen through the number of alumni Institution A has in their database: Out of 18,000 living alumni, the college has information on 14,638.

Other Outreach Methods:

Updating Alumni Addresses through the U.S. Postal Service:

In addition to tracking alumni through PolarNet, the college makes use of U.S. Postal Service records to keep in touch with graduates and former students. According to contacts, the postal service will not provide Change of Address (COA) information on individuals who have moved, unless the mailer (the requesting party) possesses the former address. Therefore, if Alumni Relations sends out a reunion update, for example, and the postcard is returned to sender, the college may request an alumnus' updated address from the U.S. Postal Service. Contacts explain, "It costs a little more [about 50 cents per address], but it's worth it." Currently, the Alumni office conducts one "address update finder" per year.

Career Advisory Network:

Members of the Career Advisory Network (CAN) volunteer to mentor students and recent graduates and offer career advice. Currently, there are over 1,600 alumni participating in the program. In order to maximize effectiveness, the college expects that all CAN members will keep their alumni profiles up-to-date. Contacts note that the program is a valuable strategy for acquiring current alumni data.

Alumni Email Forwarding:

Like many other institutions, Institution A allows graduates to sign up for alumni email accounts. The college reports that the vast majority of alumni take advantage of this free service, noting that in recent years, Alumni Relations has practically required graduating seniors to create an account: "We pretty much hunt everyone down and make sure they have signed up for PolarNet and an alumni email address. It's time consuming for the [student] class representatives, but it is a great way for us to keep in touch with everyone."

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION B

Introduction:

As a small school with a close-knit undergraduate community, Institution B enjoys high rates of alumni participation but frequently assesses new strategies to better connect with graduates.

Organizational Structure:

The Advancement Division houses the offices of Alumni and Parent Relations, Development, and Advancement Services (collectively charged with gift records, all demographic updates, and research).

Outreach Methods:

One-Year Reunion Cycles:

Contacts note that recent graduates are difficult to track because they change jobs and locations frequently. So, in order to keep in touch with these young alumni, Institution B recently instituted a one-year reunion that takes place at the same time as the traditional 5- and 10-year reunions. These events bring former students back to campus and engage them quickly in the alumni networking process, building affinities and strong connections with the college.

Biographical Update Cards:

Historically, alumni did not respond to blank address update postcards, potentially because of the time commitment or the lack of personalization in the outreach method. To address the issue, Institution B began sending pre-populated cards that only require alumni to change any inaccurate biographical information. This update process is more personalized and cuts down on time required of the alumnus. Contacts note that this past year, of the 5,200 alumni contacted, 3,800 returned completed cards. The cards are sent one year prior to each 5- year reunion cycle so that the planning committees have the most up-to-date contact information available for alumni.

Employer Outreach:

According to contacts, the college wants a relationship with the alumnus, not the employer: “We never reach out directly to employers. I don’t think that is appropriate.” However, if an alumnus is performing well at an organization or serving in a leadership role, there is an opportunity to boost internship and job postings on campus and build the matching gift program for donations. Therefore, Institution B will only contact alumni employers in two instances:

1. If Career Services deems that the company may have internships or full-time positions for Institution B students and graduates.
2. If a large contingent of alumni work at a particular firm, Advancement might contact them if the company’s matching gift program has changed. Contacts emphasize, though, that communication is through the alumni, not the employer.

Homegrown Alumni Directory:

Instead of relying on an outside vendor (i.e., Harris), Advancement Services has begun collecting information from alumni internally (through biographical update cards). In order to obtain timely information and connect with recent graduates before the five-year mark, the college will implement several features to replace the services previously provided by Harris:

Portal: Through the alumni portal, the college will be able to “more easily deliver more targeted content to certain classes.” For example, Advancement will contact seniors with “keep-in-touch” messaging, detailing how they can stay connected to the college as alumni. Students will maintain the same class-specific access to the portal after they graduate.

Lifetime Email Address: Messages sent to Institution B alumni email address are forwarded on to the graduate’s personal account.

SIC Codes: Advancement Services will load Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes for each industry into the online database so that alumni may self-identify the field in which they work. The directory is then searchable by industry and can also serve as a networking tool. Contacts hope this will lead to more frequent use and updating of the portal.

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION C

Introduction:

With a database of over 65,000 alumni and former students, Institution C employs various strategies for encouraging graduates to remain connected with their alma mater. For example, The Alumni Association has embraced online networking communities like Facebook and MySpace.

Organizational Structure:

The Alumni Office is one of several divisions of the Office of University Advancement that currently shares responsibility for connecting with graduates and former students. Contacts report, though, that there is a definite need to have one central office through which all alumni communication and outreach is administered.

Outreach Methods:

Graduation Celebration:

To hook recent graduates as soon as possible and introduce them to the benefits of alumni engagement, the Alumni Office organizes a day-long event for seniors during graduation week, which includes:

- A “Real World 101” course
- Information sessions on graduate school
- Literature on the benefits of joining the Alumni Association

Additionally, there are information tables for class ring orders, career and graduate school advice, and resume reviews. At each table and event, students receive a stamp on their “graduation passport.” While students must earn a minimum number of stamps in order to pick up their cap and gown, the university also offers prizes (e.g., iPods and free yearbooks) to those students who have visited the most tables. The Alumni Office may soon require all seniors to sign up for an alumni email account and update their contact information in order to pick up the cap and gown.

Alumni Mailings:

Institution C’s executive director of the alumni office is a staple of the community who has served the school for over twenty years. Since students respect him and recognize his name, the majority of general mailings from the university include his signature. According to contacts, “Many graduates know him and thus are more likely to respond to a survey or a profile request from him than if it came from a college dean or even the president.”

Employer Outreach:

Contacts note that once students graduate, the university struggles to obtain updated professional information from alumni. Thus, Career Services reaches out to employers to verify each alumnus’ employment status.

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION D

Introduction:

While Institution D has approximately 95,000 living alumni, there are over 141,000 constituents (alumni, current and former students, and donors) in Advancement Services' database.

Organizational Structure:

Among other entities, the Office of University Advancement houses Advancement Services and Alumni Relations. Technically, Advancement Services is responsible for collecting alumni data and updating the university's central database, while Alumni Relations is charged with conducting all alumni outreach. Despite these roles, it is common for Advancement Services to contact graduates without the involvement of Alumni Relations staff.

Outreach Methods:

Institution D uses various strategies to reach out to alumni, but contacts report that communicating via the Internet (e.g., through email and online surveys) is the best and most cost-effective method of connecting with graduates: "Mailings are expensive and phonathons are fairly useless due to caller ID and the fact that most people use cell phones."

Specific outreach initiatives are highlighted below:

Mailing Diplomas:

Institution D graduates often change their permanent address soon after graduation and fail to update the alumni office. So, the university decided to send diplomas after the commencement ceremony, requiring students to provide Alumni Relations with their post-graduation mailing address. In addition to the actual diploma, the mailing includes biographical and employment surveys as well as information about the Alumni Association.

Tracking Former Students:

Students who do not finish their studies at Institution D are potentially valuable resources. So, Institution D tracks any student who has completed at least two semesters at the university, thereby tracking where they transferred and building a greater network of contacts.



Web-Based Survey:

Response rates to hard-copy surveys were low. To boost survey response rates, Advancement Services launched a Web-based questionnaire that requests biographical information from graduates from the 1960s and 1970s. Once these cohorts are updated in the database, the office will reach out to alumni from classes of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

Young Alumni Program:

Seniors and recent graduates respond better to their peers than to the alumni relations office. To tap into their enthusiasm, Alumni Relations runs a young alumni leadership program called GOLD: Graduates of the Last Decade. In addition to soliciting donations for the senior gift from their former classmates, members of the group plan receptions and networking events for current students and recent alumni.

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION E

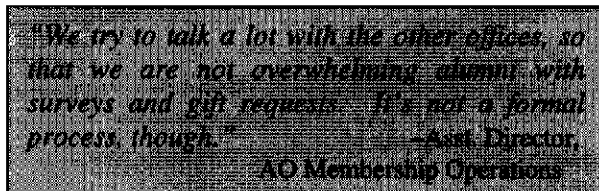
Introduction:

Despite the Institution E's traditionally large commuter and part-time student population, the institution is able to maintain an alumni database with approximately 100,000 graduates and former students.

Organizational Structure:

Although the Alumni Organization (AO) works directly with the university (in particular Career Services to update the central database), the group is a completely autonomous organization; this allows the AO to represent the interests of Institution E's alumni and avoid the political constraints of a publicly-funded institution. The AO does, however, share a common database with University Advancement, which includes the Development and University Relations offices.

While ideally, the AO would coordinate all alumni outreach, contacts note that Advancement Services, Career Services, and the Athletic Department all communicate with alumni on a fairly consistent basis. Thus, it is important to have clear communication between offices to ensure that alumni are not over-touched.



"We try to talk a lot with the other offices, so that we are not overwhelming alumni with surveys and gift requests. It's not a formal process, though."
—Asst. Director,
AO Membership Operations

Outreach Methods:

Several of the AO's outreach methods are solely for updating contact information and soliciting alumni memberships. However, the AO also facilitates opportunities for alumni to engage with one another—in turn, connecting these graduates to the university. Not only do alumni appreciate these networking opportunities, but contacts also note that reunions, and other such events, can serve as an impetus for a graduate's ongoing connection with, and contribution to, the university. As one contact explains, though, "When you look at alumni programming and how it relates to the data you are able to gather, it is important to prioritize—if you have a large membership, that's great. But how do you make that experience meaningful?"

Bio-Update Mailings:

Every two years, the AO sends a mass mailing to alumni asking them to update their biographical information. Additionally, this mailing is used to encourage current alumni members to upgrade to the next membership level and to invite non-members to join the association.

Career Mentoring:

"My Cougar Connection Mentoring" is a Career Services program facilitated by the AO. Both current students and alumni may contact registered graduates and discuss career options via email, phone, and in person meetings. As noted by other schools, young alumni are initially more willing to contribute their time than their money; nonetheless, by fostering relationships with graduates and encouraging them to remain connected with their alma mater, universities are often able to attract more substantial donations down the road.

Business Card Exchange:

The "Cougar Business Card Exchange" allows alumni to create and exchange electronic business cards. As contacts note, "Whether you are looking for quality products and services or you have a product or service to provide, this is the place to be." Each day, the AO spotlights a business from a particular industry. Because of the potential for professional networking, alumni refer to the site frequently and are motivated to update their contact information.

Affinity Networks:

Alumni join affinity clubs based on their academic or co-curricular interests as undergraduates (e.g., Asian Alumni Association and the Pharmacy Alumni Association). Business and academic groups are especially successful with student outreach. Contacts explain, "The employer groups evolved over time, because for most people, they spend a lot of their time in the office, so that is a natural network and an easy way of connecting with other alumni." Moreover, because of the large presence of Institution E alumni at particular companies, it is common for those graduates and their employer to attend university job fairs, recruit current students, and conduct on-campus interviews.

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION F

Introduction:

With more than 19,000 undergraduates and almost 25,000 students overall, Institution F has a significant alumni contingent. While the Alumni Association faces challenges in gathering alumni employment data, it maintains a database of over 130,000 former students by offering “a variety of programs that promote lasting relationships between students, alumni, and the University.”

Organizational Structure:

The Alumni Association is governed by a 40-member board of directors and supported by a staff of six university employees. The Association’s staff works closely with the Development Office to track alumni information.

Outreach Methods:

Alumni Associations:

All alumni, former students, friends of the university (donors), and current students are eligible to join either the Alumni Association or the Student Alumni Association. However, the university tracks biographical and employment information on all alumni, regardless of their membership status. While Institution F has up-to-date email addresses for 21,000 alumni (who receive monthly e-newsletters and invitations to events), only about 8,000 are active members of the Alumni Association.

Diploma Stuffing:

Institution F stuffs diplomas with postcards informing graduates about the Alumni Association and asking them to update their profiles. Contacts state that this outreach method reaches a broad audience at a low cost.

Student and Young Alumni Chapters:

The Alumni Association at Institution F has groups for current students (the Student Alumni Association (SAA)) and for recent graduates (the Young Alumni Chapter (YAC)). According to contacts, these groups “allow the university to engage students and young alumni as early as possible.” Established in 2002, YAC has a membership of more than 10,000 former students, alumni, and friends of Institution F. From monthly happy hours and pizza/laser tag parties to a reception for student leaders and the annual graduation party, the chapter holds a number of events in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

The Student Alumni Association coordinates similar events. While it may seem counterintuitive to have an alumni group for current students, contacts explain that “the purpose of the SAA is to enable its thousands of members to begin building a relationship with the [Institution F] Alumni Association... while still in college.”

Both the Student Alumni Association and the Young Alumni Chapter charge membership fees of \$15. Receptions and activities are generally planned with participation from both groups; events include:

Fundraising

- Tuition Raffle
- Graduation Rose Sales

Leadership Development

- Etiquette Dinner
- Leadership Retreat
- Student Leader Alumni Reception

Networking

- Meetings with Alumni
- Board of Directors
- Distinguished Alumni Gala

Affinity Groups:

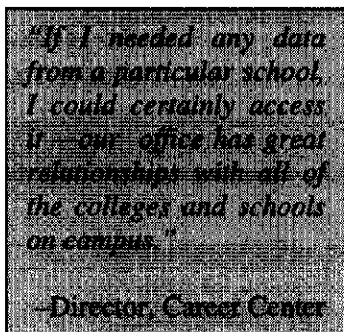
Affinity groups such as the Hispanic Alumni Chapter, the Institution F Varsity Club, and the Cadet Corps Alumni Council reach three to five percent of all graduates. These chapters strengthen the university’s support base and create a network for the distribution of alumni information. Contacts note that it is important for Institution F to provide graduates with various outlets for connecting with each other and the university. As contacts explain, though, “We fight a very commuter/urban school reputation, so it is a challenge to get involvement from our alumni.”

III. PROFILES: INSTITUTION G

Introduction:

Established in 1987, Institution G's Alumni Association serves over 110,000 alumni and friends of the university.

Organizational Structure:



"If I needed any data from a particular school, I could certainly access it - our office has great relationships with all of the colleges and schools on campus."
-Director, Career Center

Institution G does not have one central office to handle all alumni outreach. For example, career services collaborates with the Office of Institutional Research to conduct the "Grad Follow-up Study," a survey that captures alumni employment data (the Alumni Association has access to any information collected through this survey).

Additionally, some schools conduct separate outreach and maintain their own information with varying degrees of success. The School of Social Work, for example, has very detailed employment and biographical information on most graduates. Despite this decentralized structure, Institution G continues to strengthen alumni outreach by streamlining institutional efforts to avoid overlap and minimize "survey fatigue."

Outreach Methods:

Career Center Surveys:

To increase response rates, career services sends surveys via the individual colleges rather than through the president's office. Students often feel a closer connection to their particular school than to the university as a whole. Therefore, as alumni, they are more likely to complete a survey if it comes from a familiar dean instead of the new university president, for example; contacts note that the annual response rate is approximately 20 percent. This strategy is more successful in smaller university colleges, such as the School of Social Work, which has nearly a 100 percent response rate. Contacts explain, "When you have a cohort of about 60 people, it is a little bit easier to get responses than if you have a couple of thousand people you are trying to reach out to. Alumni feel more of a connection."

Alumni Association Online Networking:

The Alumni Office partnered with LinkedIn to create an online social and career network after realizing that many young alumni were updating their information on personal online networking sites in higher numbers than they were on the university's databases.

Alumni Association Events:

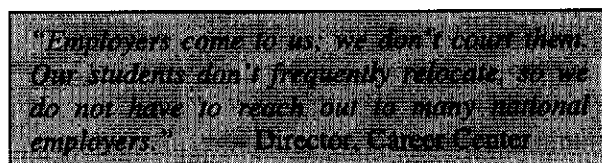
To bring more alumni back to campus (and collect updated contact information in the process), the alumni office sponsors activities such as receptions, tailgates before sporting events, cultural and arts programs, networking opportunities, and educational courses.

Updating Employment Information:

While alumni may not have the resources to contribute to the university financially, they are often willing to give back to their alma mater in other ways. Graduates frequently voice interest in advising current students in the career search process. Thus, the university offers a career mentoring program that connects alumni with current students and recent graduates. This advising program enables the alumni relations office to collect updated employment information for alumni, which it then provides to the Career Center. Using the alumnus's former student identification number, the Career Center links employment data with the alumnus's undergraduate major. Current students can use this information to learn what kinds of career opportunities evolve from specific undergraduate majors. Contacts note that alumni seem more willing to provide updated contact information when they know that it is being used to help current students with career exploration.

Employer Outreach:

Perhaps due to its urban location, Institution G has "outstanding" corporate-university relations, and numerous companies request a table at university career fairs. Also, Institution G obtains quarterly reports from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), which include information on starting salary offers to recent college graduates. Unfortunately, employer response rates to NACE surveys is cited as very modest.



"Employers come to us, we don't court them. Our students don't frequently relocate, so we do not have to reach out to many national employers."
-Director, Career Center

Professional Services Note

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