



30 Minute Mentors

Reimagining Mentorship as One-Time Meet-Ups between
Students and Alumni

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30 Minute Mentors

Reimagining Mentorship as One-Time Meet-Ups between Students and Alumni

Practice in Brief

The University of Michigan recruits alumni volunteers willing to conduct a 30 minute, one-time mentoring session with a student or recent graduate, either in-person or online. Students select the alumnus with whom they would like to network and are put in contact by the alumni relations department. If both parties seek an ongoing relationship, they may continue to meet, but there is no requirement to do so. The highly scoped nature of the mentorship opportunity appeals to both potential alumni volunteers and students uninterested in a long-term commitment.

Rationale

Mentoring opportunities are popular engagement tools that enhance student career development. However, the demands of a long-term assignment diminish the appeal to prospective volunteers and donors. The ability to conduct the mentoring virtually also increases the ease with which any alumnus can participate and still offers the same benefits to students and alumni volunteers and donors.

Implementation Considerations

Step 1: Recruit alumni volunteers to mentor students and young graduates

Step 2: Post alumni profiles online for student review

Step 3: Market the mentorship program to students

Step 4: Connect mentors and mentees

Resource Considerations

The program requires a one-time investment of staff time to develop mentorship guidelines, marketing materials, program website, etc. Beyond the upfront investment, the program is scalable to match the number of students and alumni involved, likely requiring approximately 0.25-0.33 FTE. The University of Michigan currently handles many aspects of program administration (e.g., turning alumnus information into an online profile, sending an e-mail to connect the student and alumnus) in a manual fashion, without using a CRM or other system to automate.

Profiled Institution:

- University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI

A Beginning, a Middle, and an End

While mentorship is one of the most common asks that institutions make of their alumni, it can also be the most nebulous, featuring unclear timeframe and vague expectations for involvement. The University of Michigan Alumni Association's "30 Minute Mentors" program reimagines this onerous commitment as a one-time and tightly-scoped activity.

Mentors are asked to create a short profile for the alumni association website that expires after one month or after it hits an alumnus-determined capacity for students to register interest (one, two, or three students seeking to talk to them). This creates a sort of market for one-time mentorship.

There are several clear benefits to the redesigned program. First, the "30 minute" branding appeals to busy alumni. Moreover, clear guidelines govern student and alumni expectations. For example, students are not permitted to seek resume help, ask for a job, and must come prepared with a few specific questions.

Most notably, there is no expectation to create an ongoing relationship unless both parties choose to do so naturally. The program creates a short-term opportunity for alumni-student interaction that can lay the groundwork for a mentorship relationship, *but does not compel one.*

"30-Minute Mentors" Program Offers Meaningful One-and-Done Engagement Opportunity

Contributions of Program Stakeholders



Alumni Volunteer Ask

- Create profile for alumni association website
- Participate in a 30 minute in-person or virtual conversation with one to three students over a defined time period
- No expectation to continue mentorship



Student Responsibilities

- View alumni profiles on alumni association website
- Submit request for a specific alumni connection
- Schedule 30 minute conversation with alumni mentor during the specified time period



Alumni Association Role

- Ensure alumni profiles are removed at end of month or when registration capacity is hit
- Provide students and alumni with clear guidelines for contact (e.g. no job asks or resume write-ups)
- Connect students to alumni for introductions

Formalizes the Way Mentorship Actually Occurs, Rather than Enforces Unrealistic Paradigm

Contacts at the University of Michigan explain that it may sound counterintuitive for a mentorship program to require no ongoing interaction. However, this simply recognizes that high-quality mentorship relationships can only occur from a true and mutual desire to maintain interaction. Even when institutions create multi-year mentorship programs, they inevitably fizzle out if either the alum fails to follow-up or student loses interest.

The University of Michigan acknowledged that reality and formalized it, rather than insist on the fiction of multi-year mentorships that inevitably dissolve. In this way, it distinguishes what universities often call "mentorship" from what is really "networking" – an opportunity to meet and discuss industry-specific questions with someone who works in your field or profession of interest.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Modern Twist on a Tried-and-True Classic

The University of Michigan's program serves as an effective on-ramp to engage: 65% of participating alumni agree to sign up for another mentorship and many mentors have participated for multiple years.

To ensure the program can further scale, staff have modified the initial setup. Now, staff assign each month a certain industry or demographic theme around which they solicit mentors and mentees. This eases staff ability to recruit students and alumni by allowing them to target marketing to specific segments and to collaborate with a limited set of key partners, rather than to advertise to the entire campus and alumni base. For example,, during a month focused on non-academic careers for PhD students, staff publicize the program through listservs in the graduate school and graduate student government and solicit potential mentors by asking longtime faculty.

A particularly successful month matched recent graduates to older alumni. Sixty older alumni signed up to participate and 54 were matched successfully. As a result of its success, staff now plan to alternate months that serve students and that serve recent graduates.

Limited Commitment Resonates with Busy Alumni

2015 in Review

117

Unique alumni mentors serving **211** unique participants (many participate multiple times)

4.3

Average satisfaction score for alumni (on a 5-point scale)

65%

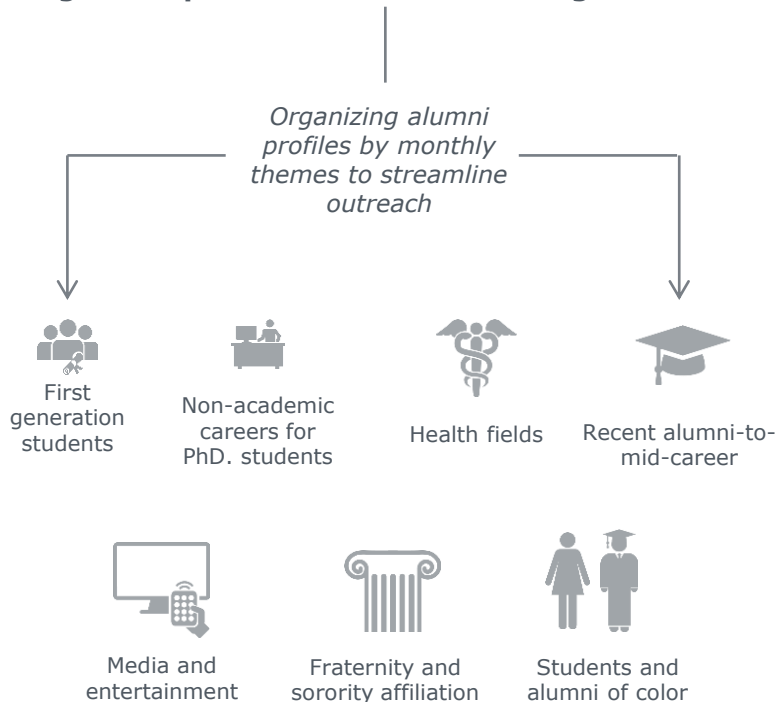
Of alumni agree to sign up for another mentorship



"We live in a fast-paced society, and knowing there's an endpoint to their service makes it appealing. They can fit it into their schedules."

*Ayanna McConnell
Director of Alumni and Student Enrichment, Alumni Association
University of Michigan*

Organic Expansion Leads to New Program Format



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Step 1: Recruit Alumni Volunteers

The Director of Alumni and Student Enrichment at the University of Michigan Alumni Association markets the program to alumni through both broad-based and targeted asks.

Dues-paying members of the Alumni Association receive a general email request to join the program. Volunteers from alumni regional chapters also receive a more personalized ask, which has a higher success rate.

To increase the diversity of careers in which they can offer mentorships, the Director of Alumni and Student Enrichment works with the alumni affairs offices across various academic units to suggest names of good mentors.

Finally, she works with development officers to identify donors to scholarships funds and to the alumni association. Because these donors have a preexisting affinity for student success, the University of Michigan is able to source approximately 10% of mentors from this population. This provides gift officers focused on student priorities an excellent cultivation and stewardship strategy for donors in their portfolio.

Institutions with fewer preexisting relationships or alumni data may turn to LinkedIn or other professional websites to identify possible mentors.

Alumni Volunteer Recruitment Efforts



Director of Alumni and Student Enrichment

- 1 Email broad-based ask to dues-paying alumni association members
- 2 Email targeted ask to alumni regional chapter volunteers
- 3 Partner with alumni affairs offices in academic units
- 4 Petitions development officers to recommend alumni that donate to scholarship funds or the alumni association

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The volunteer form not only supplies the information a student would need to connect with the mentor but also contact information for the advancement office. Affinity groups, degree information, and contact information are important, but merely filling out the form also demonstrates affinity for the university.

Sample Volunteer Form

First Name	<input type="text"/>	Last Name	<input type="text"/>
City/State	<input type="text"/>	Email	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>	LinkedIn Profile URL	<input type="text"/>
Degree/s	<input type="text"/>	Degree Year/s	<input type="text"/>

Affiliations (identify affinity groups, student orgs, Greek life, student employment, etc.)

Position/Job Function	<input type="text"/>	Organization / Career Field	<input type="text"/>
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What would you tell student(s) and/or [INSTITUTION] alumni who are interested in meeting you?

Alumni Association Member? Yes No, but tell me more about membership

What kind of volunteer opportunities are you interested in (check all that apply)?

In-person in [INSTITUTION LOCATION] because I live close by

In-person in [INSTITUTION LOCATION] when I am visiting

In-person in or near my city/town

Skype or Google Hangout

We offer many kinds of career volunteer opportunities. What are you interested in (check all that apply)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Networking with [INSTITUTION] students	<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking at an event
<input type="checkbox"/> Networking with [INSTITUTION] alumni	<input type="checkbox"/> Presenting on a professional development or career topic (please specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring [INSTITUTION] students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring [INSTITUTION] alumni	

More information:

Source: "Career Volunteers," University of Michigan, <http://alumni.umich.edu/connect/share-your-career-experiences-volunteer-form>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Step 2: Post Alumni Profiles Online

Alumni communicate information to staff, who create online alumni profiles where students may register to request a mentoring conversation. Currently, alumni and students are paired manually by alumni relations staff, however they plan to move to a CRM that will automate the process.

To expand the pool of potential alumni volunteers past those who live near campus, the University of Michigan created an online program variant. Approximately 110 of the 198 matches over 2014-2015 were conducted virtually. The low time commitment and the convenience of conducting the mentorship conversations over the phone or online (e.g., Skype, Google Hangout) has greatly expanded the reach and appeal of their program.

Those who seek to connect face-to-face select a specific date and location during which the Alumni Association will host an event to gather alumni mentors and student mentees.

In survey responses, alumni indicate the 30-minute window is an ideal timeframe.

Online Profiles Create An Online Mentor Marketplace

Student/Alumni Pairing Process

- 1 Students review alumni profiles online
- 2 Students register online and select an alumnus with whom they would like to connect
- 3 Alumni relations staff share alumni contact information with the student
- 4 Student reaches out to alumnus within one month of the pairing and identifies potential meeting times and the preferred method of contact

Distance Option Resonates with Busy Alumni

198

Matches made in 2014-2015 year; 56% were virtual and 44% face-to-face

30%

Of participants were graduate students, a difficult-to-reach group

85%

Satisfaction rate of alumni

Sample Online Alumni Profiles

Haley Anderson

Class Year: 2008

Title: Director of Research

Employer: The Alvarez Agency

Career Field: Qualitative Research

Max Cellier

Class Year: 1991

Title: Assistant District Attorney

Employer: State of Hawaii

Career Field: Law

Grace Welker

Class Year: 1988

Title: Chief Executive Officer

Employer: Barnes Incorporated

Career Field: Publishing

Kim Studwell

Class Year: 1969

Title: Managing Director

Employer: Catalani Industries

Career Field: Sports Marketing

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Step 3: Market to Students Through Student Groups

Staff market this program through university listservs, social media, web pages, etc.

Ensure that No Alumnus Goes Unwanted



Potential Drawback

The relationship with an alumnus who volunteers as a mentor can be damaged if no student selects them as a desired mentor



Solution

Promote alumni profiles to students interested in the alumnus' career field

The online platform allows students to access the mentorship program with ease. However, it can be disappointing to acquire an alumni volunteer only to have no student with whom to match them. If the Director of Alumni and Student Enrichment notices that an alumni profile is lingering without attention, she will then work to identify a student who might be interested in that alumnus' professional area:

- Send e-mails to student organization listservs that relate to that individual's field
- Ask staff in the alumni relations office or career center of the academic school or college that connects to the individual's field if they know if any potential students who would be interested

Step 4: Connect Mentors and Mentees

Once a student expresses interest in an alumnus, staff send an e-mail to manually connect the two and coordinate their virtual meeting or to exchange logistics for an in-person meet-up at one of several designated gathering places planned by the Alumni Association to bring together mentors and mentees. In these messages, they share guidelines developed for mentees and mentors.

Sample Mentorship Guidelines for Students

As a 30 Minute Mentor participant, you are expected to present yourself in a professional and appropriate manner when interacting with alumni volunteers.

- Make the initial contact within five business days (after 30 days your volunteer match will expire). Your introductory email should include:
 - Your preferred method of contact
 - Several meeting times during the day during which you could connect
 - Your goals for the 30 Minute Mentor session
 - Your background including major, graduation year, activities, clubs, and work experience (a resume may be attached)
- Respond to communications from the mentor in a timely manner
- Attire during on-campus or video sessions should be business casual
- Do not ask for a job or internship or edits to your resume
- You may want to bring a resume or business card to share
- Remember to complete the post mentoring survey
- If you need to cancel the appointment, please do so at least 24 hours in advance

Source: "30 Minute Mentors Program," University of Michigan, <http://alumni.umich.edu/sites/default/files/Virtual%20Mentoring%20Guidelines%20for%20Students.pdf>; EAB interviews and analysis.



Want to Learn More?

This practice brief is part of the EAB Advancement Forum's research initiative, entitled: "The New Rules of Engagement: Building the Next Generation of Alumni Leaders and Volunteers."

To learn more about this research and to find other resources, access the [Alumni Leadership and Volunteerism Resource Center](#). If you have any trouble accessing this page, please consult your Dedicated Advisor.



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