Administering Programs to Engage Alumni with Students

Program Overview, Operation, and Outcomes

Advancement Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Contacts identify employment upon graduation as the most important factor in student satisfaction with institutions; alumni organizations facilitate employment by networking students with alumni. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 70 percent of employees in the U.S. find jobs through networking.[1] Alumni organizations (e.g., alumni affairs offices, alumni associations, student alumni associations) build alumni networks through online contact systems, social media groups, and in-person events. Common networking events include alumni speaker series, panel discussions, and dinners that unite students and alumni.

Students at technical institutions receive encouragement to persist through rigorous academic programs from interactions with alumni. Alumni who endured rigorous academic programs and experienced successful employment outcomes serve as role models for current students. Alumni and student organizations at technical institutions highlight notable alumni through annual speaker series; these alumni encourage students to persist and follow their intended paths.

Young alumni seek involvement with current students. While young alumni (i.e., alumni who have graduated within the last ten years) may lack financial resources to contribute fiscally to the institution, contacts report high rates of young alumni participation in programs that directly relate to students (e.g., mentor programs, crowd funding for student fellowships). Contacts report younger alumni board members ask to include current students in alumni association board events; students relate better to alumni close to them in age than to older alumni.

Alumni organizations (e.g., alumni affairs offices, alumni associations, student alumni associations) fund programs for students and alumni. Events range in cost from $25 for speaker gifts to $10,000 for 200-person seated dinners. While no profiled institutions directly measure return on investment for student and alumni programs, feedback surveys evaluate satisfaction with program offerings. At **Institution C**, 67 percent of student participants reported satisfaction with the alumni mentor program structure and administration; 78 percent reported satisfaction with the alumni mentor relationship.

No profiled institutions offer alumni programs that specifically target international students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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1) United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (2013).

2) Programs Connecting Students and Alumni

Incoming Students

Admitted Student Open Houses Introduce Incoming Students to Institution and Alumni

Several contact institutions host open houses for admitted students in which local alumni and current students share their experiences with incoming students and parents. Alumni affairs staff assigned to the region coordinate the events; alumni volunteers greet incoming students and participate in panel discussions about their experiences at the institution and answer incoming student and parent questions.

The Department of Alumni Relations and Development at **Institution G** hosts events in private venues (e.g., theatre, golf course, museum), whereas other institutions host events in the homes of alumni.

Program Spotlight: *Institution G*

- Budget: $17,500
    - $8,000 for a summer student intern
    - $700 to $1,200 to rent space for each event
- Location: 5 locations in Canada, 4 in China, and 1 in South Korea
    - Events occur in July for international locations to accommodate student travel to campus later in the summer
    - Events occur in August for domestic locations to meet students and parents as they prepare to transition
- Participants:
    - 10 staff partners (i.e., alumni relations staff assigned to region)
    - 150 alumni volunteers (30-40 at Toronto event, 6-12 all others)
    - 450 incoming students (200 at Toronto event, 20-30 all others)
- Student intern responsibilities:
    - Send email invitations to past volunteers, past student participants, all current students, and young alumni in event regions
    - Evaluate volunteer applications and conduct phone interviews
    - Update online volunteer training module
    - Assign volunteer responsibilities (e.g., greeter, panelist, floater)
    - Create nametags for each attendee, color-coded by college
    - Serve as main point of contact for any event questions
    - Attend events near campus
    - Maintain attendance records

Orientation Events Engage New Students in Alumni Activities

Alumni associations host events at the start of the school year to engage first-year students from the beginning of their time on campus. The president of the **Institution E** alumni association speaks at convocation, an event welcoming new students. Contacts recommend reaching students as soon as possible to foster a sense of community and familiarity with the alumni association.

Current Students

Student Alumni Groups Build Awareness of Alumni Resources

All profiled institutions maintain student alumni groups to connect students to alumni. Contacts agree that students who engage with the institution more likely remain involved as alumni; student alumni associations increase the number of students involved with the institution and therefore more likely to engage with and donate to the institution in later years.

At **Institution C**, 20 percent of the total student body (both undergraduate and graduate students) pays $10 each year to join the student alumni association; members receive a bag of paraphernalia (e.g., t-shirts, coupons, branded items) and access to programs with alumni (e.g., mentoring, speaker series).

At **Institution D**, the student alumni association president maintains full-time summer employment with the alumni relations office and part-time employment throughout the academic year to plan student and alumni programs.

Characteristics of Student Alumni Associations

Larger Institutions (>25,000 students)*

Smaller Institutions (<25,000 students)**

Canadian contacts note that membership-based organizations are more common in the U.S. than the U.K. or Canada.

- Often the largest student organization on campus
- Programs only open to student alumni association members

Goal: Connect students with alumni

- Promoted as leadership experience for students
  - At **Institution D**, alumni relations staff select the student alumni association president; the president selects 25 student ambassadors to assist with event planning
- Programs open to all students

*Larger Institutions: Institution C, Institution E, Institution F
**Smaller Institutions: Institution A, Institution B, Institution D, Institution G

Facilitate Alumni Mentor Programs to Guide Students through College Experience and Post-Graduate Life

Alumni mentor programs pair current students with alumni; alumni offer paired students advice and networking opportunities. Mentoring occurs through formal events (e.g., speed networking for local student and alumni pairs) as well as informal conversations, either in-person or electronic. Contacts at **Institution B** note that formal mentoring programs require a high level of staff capacity to create mentor pairs and organize mentor events.

The **Institution C** alumni association and student alumni association have sponsored an alumni-to-student mentoring program for over 10 years. The program facilitates more than 1,200 pairs of students and mentors each year. Young alumni compose approximately 60 percent of mentors.

Alumni-Student Mentor Pair Matching Process

Registration

Start registration process prior to the start of the academic year. Registration for the academic year's mentor cycle opens on July 1, with a deadline of the first day of classes (mid-August) for the first round of pairing.

Collect student and alumni characteristics through online registration form. The online registration form requires several pieces of information used in the matching process (e.g., education, professional industry, professional skills, job title, personal interests, employer).

Pair Matching

Segment student and alumni populations. Certain populations of students have very different needs from one another. Separate underclassman, upperclassman, athletes, graduate students, and evening MBA students to find matches with alumni who can provide relevant advice and support (see next page for suggestions).

Seek insight from alumni affairs staff on alumni participants. Mentor program staff meet with alumni affairs staff periodically throughout the matching period to learn about alumni who have registered for the mentor program.

Match students and alumni manually via spreadsheets. While contacts describe the process as tedious and time consuming, thus far it has proven to be the best method to create mentoring pairs. Fully automated matching programs depend on registration fields that have set menu options (i.e. drop-down lists). Fields where participants can enter prose provide pivotal information that helps find threads of common interest, however.

Communication

Send "You've Been Paired!" emails at bimonthly intervals. While most registrations occur in July, August and September, participants can enter the mentor program through the first semester. Program administrators encourage students and alumni to sign up early in order to ensure the best pair possible and take full advantage of the structured portions of the program.

Send variety of daily, weekly, and monthly emails to prompt mentor interactions. Contacts recommend tailoring content to student and alumni audiences to provide the most relevant information regarding conversation tips and resources.

Tailored Messages and Advice to Different Student Audiences

Adapted from Institution C's Mentor Program

Underclassman	Upperclassman	Graduate Students
▪ Professor and course selection guidance ▪ Choosing organizations for campus involvement ▪ Strategies to maintain motivation and focus ▪ Suggested reading ▪ Internship guidance	▪ Networking ▪ Translating a major into a job and career ▪ Graduate school guidance ▪ Salary negotiation ▪ Transitioning into the workforce ▪ Professional appearance	▪ Managing student loan debt ▪ Taking advantage of the institution and city ▪ Work-life balance ▪ Post-doctoral fellowships ▪ Leveraging graduate degree in salary negotiations

More Prepared for the Real World

78%

78 percent of students in **Institution C**'s alumni mentor program report that they "feel more prepared for the real world" as a result of participation.

"LinkedIn is the perfect tool for this program, as it promotes interaction between all alumni and students, thereby emphasizing the importance of networking within the broader institutional community."

Program Spotlight: *Institution C*

▪ Participants:

- 1 full-time staff member

- 1,200 students and alumni across the globe

▪ Structure:

- Mentor pairs develop their partnerships through face–to-face interactions, electronic communication, telephone conversations, video and teleconferencing, and programming exclusively designed for members of the program (e.g., end-of-year picnic)

- Events focus on making connections, developing mentoring partnerships, understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, and leadership

- Staff create virtual events for participants who do not live locally

▪ Communication:

- Program website includes page answering frequently asked questions for both alumni and students

- Program website lists upcoming events and provides event descriptions and registrations

- Program staff manage social media groups on Facebook and LinkedIn

▪ Results:

- 67% of student participants reported satisfaction with program structure and administration

- 78% of student participants reported satisfaction with their alumni mentor relationship

- 75% of eligible (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior) student participants plan to continue their participation in the program

Networking Events Strengthen Student Connection to Alumni

Students want the alumni association to connect them with opportunities that will lead to a job. Networking events introduce students to professionals in their future fields. Business etiquette events prepare students to succeed in professional environments.

Program Spotlight: *Institution B*

- Budget: $10,000
    - Costs: dinner, prizes
    - Sponsoring units: alumni association, student advising
- Timing: night before major declaration in the Spring semester
- Participants:
    - 30 to 40 alumni
    - 150 students
- Format:
    - Seat 2 to 5 alumni at each table
    - Students rotate between tables every 15 minutes
    - Students collect tickets for each alumnus with whom they speak
    - Tickets are entered for prizes at the end of the evening

The student alumni association at **Institution B** receives funding from the alumni association, the student activities office, and fundraising events.

Program Spotlight: Dinner and Dialogue *(Institution B)*

- Budget: $2,500 for 2 to 3 events throughout the academic year
    - Costs: dinner, marketing
    - Sponsoring departments: student alumni association
- Participants:
    - 1 to 3 local alumni per event
    - 15 to 20 students per event
- Format:
    - Students sign up for event several weeks in advance
    - Students prepare questions for alumni
    - Alumni panel speaks on topic of interest (e.g., business travel, networking, entrepreneurship)
    - Alumni and students enjoy dinner at the alumni house

Connect Students to Job Opportunities to Increase Satisfaction

Two **Institution F** alumni chapters schedule job fairs in their local communities over Spring Break; students network with graduates and meet with local employers to pursue internship and full-time employment opportunities.

The Institution F alumni association maintains a job listings website for alumni. Employers interested in hiring Institution F graduates submit a job posting form, and alumni can search for jobs by title, state, or type of employment (e.g., full-time, part-time, temporary, seasonal). Contacts encourage employed alumni to submit job postings for their companies on the site.

Job Posting Form

Adapted from Institution F's Job Board

This form is designed for employers interested in our graduates.
If you have any questions, please contact the Alumni Association.

Company Information
- Company Name
- Company Description
- Industry
- Company Website

Job Information
- Job Title
- Job Description
- Required Qualifications
- How to Apply
- Job Posting Start and End Date
- Employment Type
- Pay Range
- Location

Contact Information (for internal use only)
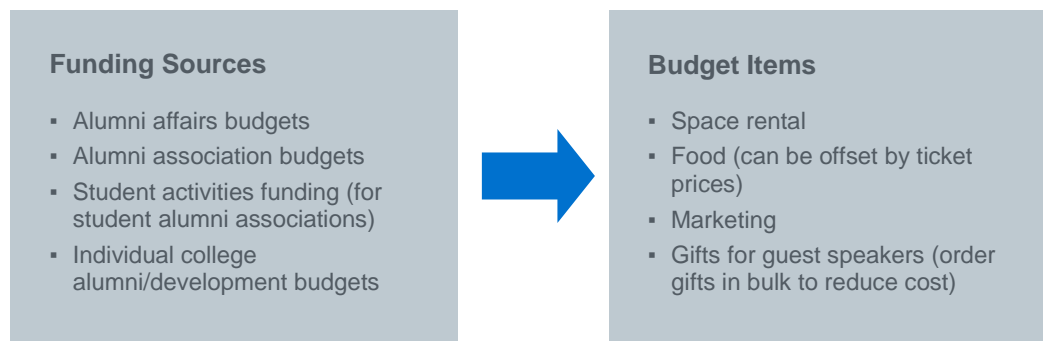
3) Program Operation

Resources

Alumni Affairs Units or Alumni Associations Administer Alumni-Student Engagement Programs

An equal number of contact institutions coordinate alumni-student programs through alumni affairs as through alumni associations. The **Institution C** alumni association employs three full-time staff members dedicated to student organizations and outreach. The **Institution F** alumni association employs one staff member dedicated to student organizations and one dedicated to young alumni programs.

Student-Alumni Program Budgets

Illustrative Example

Funding Sources

- Alumni affairs budgets
- Alumni association budgets
- Student activities funding (for student alumni associations)
- Individual college alumni/development budgets

Budget Items

- Space rental
- Food (can be offset by ticket prices)
- Marketing
- Gifts for guest speakers (order gifts in bulk to reduce cost)

Communication

Incorporate Key Event Messages into Marketing Materials to Reach a Broader Audience

Contacts invite students, alumni, and parents to events via email; student alumni associations also promote events via social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Alumni relations staff at **Institution D** direct all graduating students, rather than event attendees, to the alumni association's Facebook page for event photos and additional information. A mass approach reaches students who did not attend.

"

Suggested Script: Communicating Future Events
Email to graduating students at Institution D

Dear Student,

Congratulations! You are close to completing your undergraduate education.

Did you know that being a graduate of our university can save you money?

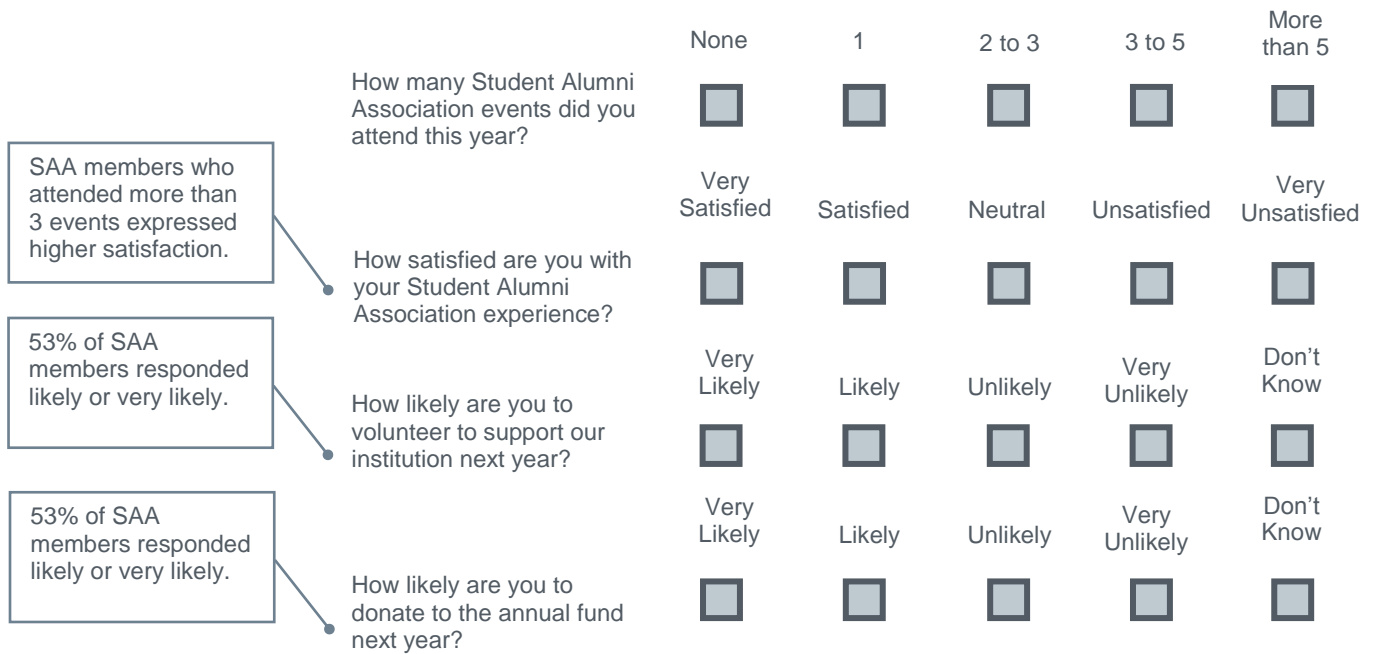Come to Grad Bash at the Alumni House next week to learn more.

4) Evaluation and Outcomes

Assessment

Feedback Surveys Assess Student Satisfaction

Only **Institution C** assesses student satisfaction with programs connecting students and alumni formally. The student alumni association (SAA) administers annual feedback surveys to members; questions assess student involvement and likelihood to contribute to the institution in the future.
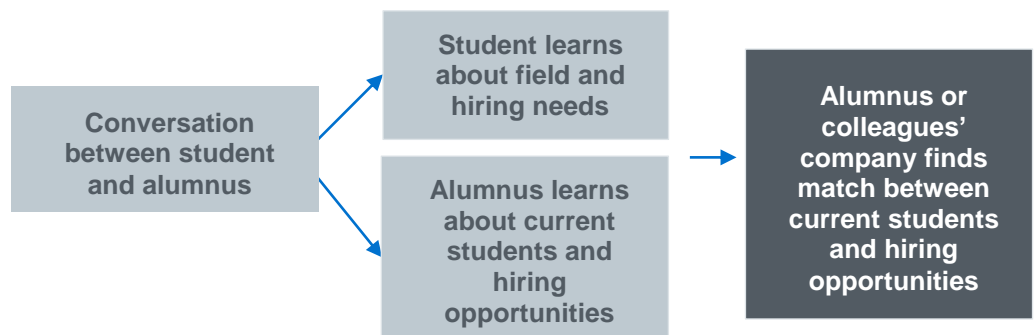
Sample Survey Questions

	None	1	2 to 3	3 to 5	More than 5
How many Student Alumni Association events did you attend this year?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SAA members who attended more than 3 events expressed higher satisfaction.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with your Student Alumni Association experience?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

53% of SAA members responded likely or very likely.

	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Don't Know
How likely are you to volunteer to support our institution next year?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

53% of SAA members responded likely or very likely.

	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Don't Know
How likely are you to donate to the annual fund next year?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Impact

Alumni Interactions Offer Students Role Models and Networking Opportunities

Students experience intangible benefits (e.g., encouragement to persist through rigorous academic programs) as well as tangible benefits (e.g., introduction to field of interest, internship or job opportunity) through connections with alumni.

Contacts confirm that alumni, especially alumni within 10 years of graduation, seek direct involvement with current students. Alumni boards at **Institution F** visit campus frequently to recruit students for internships and jobs.

Student-Alumni Program Outcomes

Conversation between student and alumnus → Student learns about field and hiring needs / Alumnus learns about current students and hiring opportunities → Alumnus or colleagues' company finds match between current students and hiring opportunities

Institutions Benefit from Cycle of Engagement

Contacts note that many factors beyond student-alumni interaction influence alumni engagement and donations to the institution. Contacts assert that programs engaging students with alumni benefit the institution, however, despite no calculation of return on investment. Based on anecdotal evidence, students and alumni programs positively influence the student experience on campus, which increases the likelihood of engagement and giving after graduation.
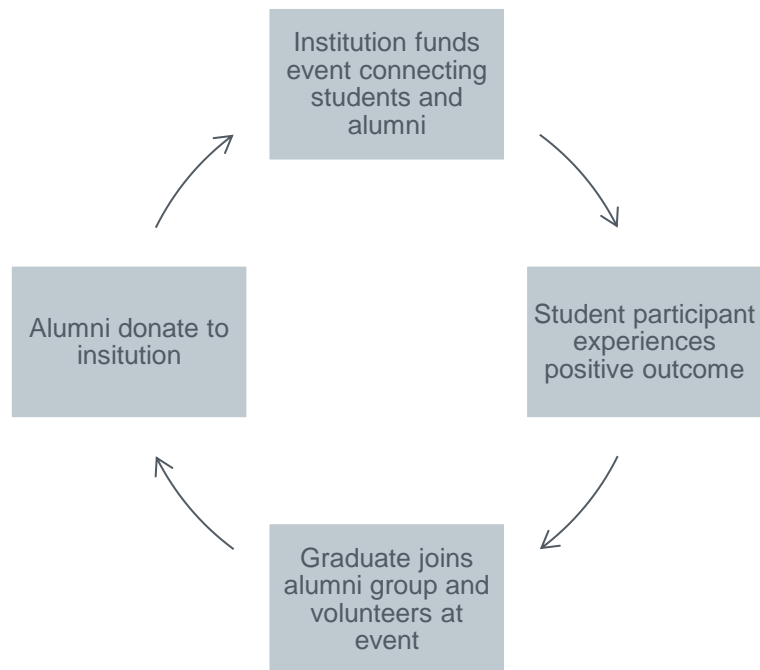
> **"**
>
> ### Create Positive Experiences to Engage Future Alumni
>
> Alumni relations officers cannot simply hope that students have had the positive experience that will make them want to be involved alumni; alumni associations need to ensure that students have the positive experiences that will make them engaged alumni.
>
> *Forum Interview*

Creating a Culture of Engagement

Institution funds event connecting students and alumni

Student participant experiences positive outcome

Graduate joins alumni group and volunteers at event

Alumni donate to insitution

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What do contacts see as the primary drivers of student satisfaction with their experience at the institution? How do contact institutions measure student satisfaction with the student experience?

- What programs do contact institutions coordinate to connect students and alumni?

- How do contact institutions engage alumni in equipping students to find employment upon graduation?

- Who participates in programs connecting students and alumni? Who oversees programs connecting students and alumni?

- How many alumni do contact institutions engage in various student activities? What are the professional and demographic characteristics of alumni volunteers?

- To what extent do strategies for engaging young alumni with current students differ from those alums who graduated more than 10 years ago?

- How do contacts fund programs connecting students and alumni? How much do programs cost?

- What methods do contacts employ to communicate with students and alumni regarding opportunities for student-alumni engagement?

- How do contact institutions evaluate the effectiveness of programs connecting students and alumni? Which programs connecting students and alumni do contacts believe have the greatest positive impact for students?

- What challenges have contacts encountered in administering programs connecting students and alumni? How have they dealt with these challenges?

- What advice do contacts offer in regards to administering programs connecting students and alumni?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)

- The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com)

- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)

- Institutional websites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed directors of alumni and student programs at public research universities in the US and Canada.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Institution A	Mid-Atlantic US	6,000 / 8,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
Institution B	Mountain West US	4,000 / 6,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
Institution C	Southern US	22,000 / 45,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution D	Ontario, Canada	4,000 / 17,000	Medical Doctoral
Institution E	Southern US	19,000 / 29,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution F	Mid-Atlantic US	24,000 / 31,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution G	Ontario, Canada	5,000 / 22,000	Medical Doctoral

Source: National Center for Education Statistics