

# Re-Imagining the Career College Sector with **Alumni Communities**

.....

**How to Set Up an Alumni Community at Your Career College Regardless of Size**

**Setting Up A Dedicated Alumni Association Web Site**

**Benefiting From Social Media**

**Alumni and Community Outreach**

**Career Services Specifically for Alumni**

**Planning Events**

**Benefits of Alumni Communities**

**Overcoming Challenges**

*With...*

- Michael Fischler
- Dr. Rita Girondi
- June Gudeman
- Donald Ivanoff
- Dr. Gary Meers
- Janet Preloger
- Dr. Susan F. Schulz
- Amy Soricelli
- John J. Stachniak
- Robert Starks Jr.
- Susan Sullivan
- Anne Sumangil



# Career Education REVIEW

The Career College Information Source



## Editor

Michael J. Cooney  
mcooney@  
careereducationreview.net

## Production Manager

Terry L. Staerkel

## Production Designer

Janet L. Grable

## Writers

Barbara A. Schmitz . . Features & Reports

Cheryl Hentz . . . . Products & Services

Judi Ditzler . . . . . Profiles & Interviews

*Career Education Review* annual subscription is \$329 and includes: two issues each month—Features & Reports, News & Opinion Digest, plus the Supplier Directory—“the career college yellow pages” listing suppliers of the career college sector.

For more information about subscriptions and advertising view our Web site at [www.careereducationreview.net](http://www.careereducationreview.net), or contact Terry Staerkel, production manager, phone: 1-800-558-8250, e-mail: [tstaerkel@careereducationreview.net](mailto:tstaerkel@careereducationreview.net)

The *Career Education Review* is a copyrighted and trademarked publication of The Baxandall Co., Inc., d/b/a Workforce Communications

### WORKFORCE COMMUNICATIONS

627 Bay Shore Drive, Suite 100, Oshkosh, WI 54901  
920-231-9950 • 1-800-558-8250 • Fax 920-231-9977

Web site: [www.workforce-com.com](http://www.workforce-com.com)

The *Career Education Review* is archived by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

© 2012 The Baxandall Co., Inc.

## Published Continuously Since 1926

The *Career Education Review* is the career college information source dedicated to providing top management, owners, investors, sector leaders and suppliers with the in-depth information required to operate a successful educational enterprise and to provide a life-changing education experience for the students served by the sector.

## Editorial and Contributors Advisory Board



**Chairman**  
**Stephen B. Friedheim**  
Education Systems & Solutions  
sfriedheim@yahoo.com



**Jayne Morehouse**  
Jayne & Company  
jayne@jayneandco.com



**Sharon Bob**  
Powers Pyles Sutter &  
Verville, P.C.  
Sharon.bob@ppsv.com



**Tom E. Netting**  
Akerman Senterfitt, LLP  
tom.netting@akerman.com



**Julia Brown**  
FAME  
jbrown@fameinc.com



**Brian Newman**  
Association of Private Sector  
Colleges and Universities (APSCU)  
brian.newman@apsco.org



**Richard R. Dumaresq**  
PAPSA  
ccdq@aol.com



**Tammy Quadri**  
Griffin Marketing Group  
tammyq@gmgmarketing.com



**Lisa Fraser**  
Making Your Mark  
LDF Publishing Inc.  
lfraser@makingyourmark.com



**Elise Scanlon**  
Elise Scanlon Law Group  
Elise.scanlon@elisescanlonlawgroup.com



**John B. Lee, Ed.D.**  
JBL Associates, Inc.  
jbl@jblassoc.com



**Florence Tate**  
SWAT Educational Services  
ftate@swat-ed.org



**Peter Leyton**  
Ritzert & Leyton, P.C.  
pleyton@ritzert-leyton.com



**Robert W. Tucker**  
InterEd, Inc.  
rt@InterEd.com



**Gary Meers**  
MaxKnowledge, Inc.  
garym@maxknowledge.com



**Harry V. Weber**  
Weber & Associates, Inc.  
Harry.Weber@weberassociatesinc.com

On The Web: [www.careereducationreview.net](http://www.careereducationreview.net)

# Contents



**Dr. Susan F. Schulz**  
**Guest Editor and Contributor**

## **Introduction**

Steve Gunderson, APSCU president and CEO, often communicates about the issues and opportunities facing the career college sector. A March 13, 2012 memo issued under Steve's name and Dr. Art Keiser, chair of the board, states: *...we face new challenges and new opportunities.*

The memo further notes: *...we also believe this is a new moment to change the conversation about who we are, what we do, and our role in providing postsecondary education in ways that keep America competitive and enable our students to improve their lives.*

It is amazing how Alumni Communities may help to provide a solution to our challenges. This issue outlines how alumni communities can be part of the re-imagining of the career college sector, its plans, and repositioning for the future.

A note about terminology:

There are major differences between traditional alumni associations and career college alumni communities. What are they? Mainly there is no fundraising in the career college sector. Instead of asking for money, the goal is to gain alumni engagement, involvement, and leveraging ability. How? Get in touch early and stay in touch often! Create strategies that result in happy and successful students. Then, as alumni, they will want to refer their friends, family, employers, and co-workers, and become local sources of influence. That's a great way to increase qualified enrollments and gain needed voices in legislative matters.

.....

## **For Our Subscribers:**

If you are a current *Career Education Review* subscriber and would like an electronic copy (PDF) of this Special Issue, please email your request to Terry Staerkel at: [tstaerkel@careereducationreview.net](mailto:tstaerkel@careereducationreview.net)



Michael Fischler



Dr. Rita Gironi



June Gudeman



Donald Ivanoff



Dr. Gary Meers



Janet Preloger

## **Alumni Communities in the Career College Sector: Opportunity to Be Seized**

*By Robert Starks Jr., MaxKnowledge, Inc.*

This article focuses on the importance of alumni to the institution's identification, reputation, success, and competitive advantage, and why this opportunity must be seized now. Robert Starks has been recognized for his best practices in alumni relations in the career college sector. **p.1**

## **How to Build an Alumni Community**

*By Susan Sullivan, Oakland City (Ind.) University*

Susan Sullivan gives practical methods for growing an alumni community with application to any sized campus. It doesn't have to be difficult! **p.4**

## **Building Alumni Communities: Short- and Long-Term Plans and Getting Buy-In From Your Constituents**

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

Based on conversations with several top alumni leaders in the career college sector, this article provides a checklist of plans to be developed when starting an alumni community. Getting buy-in from the entire college is also included. New initiatives work only when each department knows "what's in it for me?" **p.7**

## **Integrating an Alumni Community Into Your Organization and Developing an Alumni Advisory Board**

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

This article focuses on where the alumni community fits in your organization and the importance of advisory boards. **p.12**

## **Hiring an Alumni Community Director**

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

Who will function as the alumni director? Someone already on staff, or someone from outside your institution? This article provides suggestions and a job description. **p.15**

## **Building a Dedicated Alumni Web Site**

*Based on an interview with June Gudeman, Pima Medical Institute*

A leading career college alumni coordinator shares her over eight years' experience building an alumni community and the elements of just the right Web site. **p.18**

## **Harnessing Alumni Communities with Social Media**

*By Robert Starks Jr., MaxKnowledge, Inc.*

Written by a passionate career college alumni advocate, this article focuses on how alumni are brand advocates for the career college sector and how social media tools can facilitate collaboration and engagement. **p.21**

## **Building Alumni Communities Through Social Networking**

*By Janet Preloger, Academy of Art University*

Here is another view of how to build alumni communities through social networking. Sharing information, professional networking, and collaboration and resourcing are highlighted. **p.23**

## **The Role of Alumni in Service Learning**

*By Gary Meers, MaxKnowledge, Inc.*

Community outreach is essential when building the brand of a career college and to demonstrate its resources to the community. Service learning provides many opportunities for all members of the career college. This article focuses on those opportunities for alumni service-learning projects. **p.26**

## **The Impact of Alumni Communities on State Associations and PACs**

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

Based on interviews with over 15 state association leaders, this article outlines challenges state associations face and how alumni can offer solutions. **p.29**

---



Amy Soricelli



John Stachniak



Robert Starks Jr.



Susan Sullivan



Anne Sumangil

## Career Services for Alumni

*Based on an interview with Amy Soricelli, Berkeley College*

A key benefit for all graduates and alumni is employment skills training. This article focuses on career services especially for alumni, including those who may have trained at your college 20 or even 40 years ago! Their needs are a bit different compared to recent grads. **p.34**

## Developing Career Services for Alumni

*By Anne Sumangil, Rasmussen College*

Because career services for alumni are so important, this article provides an additional look at the specific employment skills training designed especially for alumni. **p.36**

## Setting Up Your First Alumni Event

*Based on an interview with June Gudeman, Pima Medical Institute*

Patience, patience and more patience are needed when setting up your first alumni event. It has to be right. This article explains how you will know when you are ready to plan an event and the “how-to’s” to be successful. **p.38**

## Establishing an Alumni Awards and Recognition Program

*By Donald Ivanoff*

This article focuses on events where alumni are recognized. All events have public relations value and should focus on recognition and appreciation. That’s what keeps alumni involved. **p.41**

## Essentials for Cultivating Alumni and the Enhancement of Reputation

*By John J. Stachniak, DeVry University*

A seasoned career college alumni professional focuses on the success of career college graduates and their impact on

the reputation of your institution. He outlines the phases of engagement that can be easily applied to any career college. **p.44**

## Sustaining and Maintaining Alumni Connections with PlanetGRAD

*By Dr. Rita Girondi, Training Masters, Inc.*

Setting up and maintaining an alumni community on campus takes a lot of organization and the right student information management system. This article focuses on technology to specifically maintain alumni records and to provide valuable information and services to keep graduates connected with your institution. **p.50**

## Bonuses of an Alumni Community, Plus Funding the Budget

*By Michael Fischler, Beyond Graduation*

Funding an alumni department is a key challenge to most career colleges. Collaboration with vendors with products and services specifically for career colleges might be one solution. **p.53**

## Overcoming the Challenges to Setting up and Developing an Alumni Community

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

Most everyone agrees about the importance of alumni communities to the career college sector. However, many career college decision-makers perceive there are too many barriers. This article is structured as a Q & A and lists the common reasons that have kept career colleges from embracing the alumni community concept. Most importantly, easy-to-implement solutions are provided, too! **p.55**

CAREER EDUCATION REVIEW'S  
Career College Event Calendar

April – June 2012

*Dates You Need to Know*

April 2012

**DETC—Distance Education & Training Council**

86th Annual Conference  
Wailea, Maui, HI  
*April 15–17*

**PCCS—Private Career Colleges & Schools**

Regions I, II & III Conference  
Financial Aid Training  
Philadelphia, PA  
*April 16–17*

**AACS—American Association of Cosmetology Schools**

Spring Management & Financial Aid Conference  
Las Vegas, NV  
*April 21–23*

**NASASPS—National Association of State Administrators & Supervisors of Private Schools**

Annual Conference  
Arlington, VA  
*April 22–25*

**TPI—Best Practices and Great Ideas**

9th Annual Conference  
Kansas City, MO  
*April 25–26*

May 2012

**TAICS—Tennessee Association of Independent Colleges & Schools**

Annual Conference  
Murfreesboro, TN  
*May 3–4*

**LAPCS—Louisiana Association of Private Colleges & Schools**

12th Annual Conference  
Baton Rouge, LA  
*May 4*

**APSA—Arizona Private School Assoc.**

Annual Conference  
Phoenix, AZ  
*May 18*

**PCCS—Private Career Colleges & Schools**

Region V Conference • Financial Aid Training  
Chicago, IL  
*May 21–22*

June 2012

**NWCCF—NW Career Colleges Federation**

Annual Conference  
Coeur d'Alene, ID  
*June 6–8*

**APSCU—Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities**

Annual Convention  
Las Vegas, NV  
*June 20–22*

# Alumni Communities in the Career College Sector: Opportunity to Be Seized

By Robert Starks Jr., MaxKnowledge, Inc.

Alumni personify the mission, vision, and values of a higher education institution. If colleges exist to help change peoples' lives, alumni are the evidence of that great mission. Alumni are an inseparable part of an organization's own success story. Why then are alumni programs rare in the career college sector? Given alumni's importance to an institution's identity, reputation, and success, alumni programs should be an essential element of any organization's perpetual institutional improvement strategy. Alumni communities represent a tremendous opportunity for competitive advantage if seized.

Failure to understand the robust benefits may be a cause of hesitation in developing alumni programs in the career college sector. For example, one

practical challenge for career colleges is maintaining accurate graduate contact information. Current contact information is critical for collecting Net Promoter Score (NPS) data, graduate satisfaction surveys, and tracking

---

***Alumni are the best source of information to make organizational enhancements because they are the product of the institution and have perspective on the entire educational experience from start to finish.***

---

employment. Having engaged alumni though makes the data collection process much more successful. Establishing stronger feedback loops with alumni can provide better data from which to



**ROBERT STARKS JR.** is the vice president of learning initiatives for MaxKnowledge, Inc., the leading employee training company for the career college sector of higher education. His experience in career services, alumni relations, and community outreach in the career education sector earned

him three Best Practice Awards from the Arizona Private School Association. Robert earned his

Masters of Science in Management from Colorado Technical University, and his undergraduate degree in marketing from Arizona State University. He is the director of media and technology for the Arizona Career Development Association (ACDA) and the founder of Careertipster.com.

**Contact Information:**

Robert Starks Jr.  
Vice President of Learning Initiatives  
MaxKnowledge, Inc.  
Twitter @robertstarksjr  
E-mail: roberts@maxknowledge.com

make critical organizational improvements. Alumni are *the* best source of information to make organizational enhancements because they are the product of the institution and have perspective on the entire educational experience from start to finish. Contact information, however, isn't the only requirement to establish this critical feedback loop. More importantly, colleges need to have strong continued

---

***Happy alumni engage in their alma mater. Thus, alumni communities represent satisfaction with the institution and brand loyalty.***

---

partnerships with alumni if they wish to harness them as a resource. Alumni communities aren't about contact information; they are about strong

relationships that can lead to many more benefits.

Another major benefit is the influence that large, engaged alumni communities have on prospective students. Happy alumni engage in their alma mater. Thus, alumni communities represent satisfaction with the institution and brand loyalty. Active alumni communities reflect a strong college culture, which indicates to prospective students that campus life is exciting. Prospective students and parents want to hear of success stories from alumni when making decisions about which career college to attend. Alumni communities can be a great source of success stories, guest speakers for orientation, potential employers, mentors for students, and so much more. Once career colleges make the effort of building and engaging alumni communities, there are multiple ways in which the alumni community can act as a tremendous organizational resource.

Ironically, despite the scarcity of alumni community programs in the career college sector, it has always been a practice for colleges to call upon

their alumni when needed. Perhaps the most powerful way in which alumni communities have demonstrated their influence is in political lobbying. Alumni of career colleges were called upon during the 2011 Hill Day event organized by APSCU to lobby against proposed Gainful Employment regulations. In addition, career colleges called upon students and alumni to sign e-petitions pledging their support for academic choice in opposition of Gainful Employment legislation. Student and alumni communities alike have always been a source of political action. At this time, the current political climate focuses the spotlight on alumni communities as a tremendous resource to influence education legislation. The only problem is that many career colleges have not invested in building collaborative partnerships with their alumni through strong alumni relations programs. Many start-up institutions haven't thought about how they can build a systematic approach to continued partnership with alumni when designing their infrastructure. Consequently, the idea, as well as the investment, of building an engaged alumni community becomes an overwhelming hindsight. Where does one even begin?

Where one begins is in the process of establishing a sustainable alumni program and this depends on many variables. How long has your career school missed the opportunity to maintain strong partnerships with alumni? How many alumni does your institution have and how updated are your records? What is the current sentiment your alumni have for their alma mater? Most importantly, do you have the vision to see what your institution could be with an engaged alumni community? Realistic expectations are necessary prior to establishing an alumni community because alumni

---

programs take time to build, particularly for organizations that have not historically had a focused, strategic alumni engagement effort. Some career colleges have hundreds of alumni whereas others have thousands. If you can imagine how such a large community could be leveraged in a collaborative partnership for the betterment of your institution and the career school sector, then you are ready to begin.

You can already envision the Return on Investment (ROI) and the competitive advantage an effective alumni community offers. For those interested in further information on how to set up an effective alumni community, MaxKnowledge offers a course listed at [www.maxknowledge.com](http://www.maxknowledge.com).

---

**Career  
Education**  
R E V I E W

# How to Build an Alumni Community

By Susan Sullivan, Oakland City (Ind.) University

**S**tart small.

First, take time to evaluate the need for an alumni community, association, or booster group. According to "How to Start/Create an Alumni Association":

"The purpose of an association is to foster a spirit of loyalty and to promote the general welfare of your organization. Alumni associations exist to support the parent organization's goals, and to strengthen the ties between alumni, the community, and the parent organization." (<http://alumni.channel.com/blog>)

Will this organization be involved with fundraising?

Will alumni be providing testimonials for advertising?

Are alumni volunteers needed to assist in events, recruiting, mentoring or other activities?

Is the school seeking student referrals from alumni?

Once a determination has been made that establishing an alumni organization will be beneficial, the structure, governance and overseeing of the organiza-

---

***Start small and grow. While this seems ultra simple, it works. Establishing a core group of successful, satisfied alumni is the first step.***

---

tion must be decided. Will it be strictly alumni managed? Will administration oversee all activities that the new organization is involved with? Will an alumni director position be created or will these responsibilities be added to a current administrator's duties? Will a board of directors be established?

These are necessary housekeeping chores to ensure the new organization



## SUSAN SULLIVAN

has been with Oakland City University for 24 years, the last five as director of alumni relations. She is quick to respond, "I have the best job on campus!"

Located on 34 acres in the rolling hills of southern Indiana, Oakland City University is

a four-year liberal arts institution founded by the Association of General Baptists in 1885. Oakland

City University stands for academic excellence in a warm, Christian environment. OCU welcomes people of all faiths to realize their educational dreams. Bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees are awarded in multiple programs. Current enrollment is 1,010 with over 9,000 alumni around the world.

## Contact Information:

Susan Sullivan MSM  
Director of Alumni Relations  
Oakland City University  
138 N. Lucretia St.  
Oakland City, IN 47660-1038

gets off to a good start. In the case of a small liberal arts school in the Midwest, an alumni board of twelve meets quarterly with an alumni director and a representative of the administration. Spend some time researching similar schools to find what works for them and adapt it to the needs of your organization.

### Start Small and Grow

While this seems ultra simple, it works. Establishing a core group of

---

***There is no value in collecting data if it is not going to be used and analyzed. Assessment is critical in proving the value of the alumni organization to the school.***

---

successful, satisfied alumni is the first step. Instructors and administration can easily identify these people. In fact, many schools start a “student alumni” chapter of current

students as a feeder system for the alumni organization. This is successful in two ways. First, you will quickly find the cream of the crop of students that will evolve into dedicated alumni. Second, it networks students and alumni for mentoring, job hunting and internships. This activity alone will pay big dividends for your organization and school.

Once this core group is established, set a time for completing a mini-SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for the organization. An experienced instructor/leader is invaluable in this process. This isn't a negative “gripe” session. This is an opportunity for alumni to give honest feedback of their experiences. Make sure this group knows and believes they are being listened to by administration. Nothing kills initiative and enthusiasm more quickly than the group feeling like the feedback is falling on deaf ears. Analyze the information that has been collected and share it with appropriate

administrators. There is no value in collecting data if it is not going to be used and analyzed. Assessment is critical in proving the value of the alumni organization to the school.

### What's Next?

The organization has been established; a solid group of five to twelve alumni have expressed a desire to be a part of it and one or two student representatives are also interested. The group has met and organized, set meeting dates, time and locations. Great start! So what do you do now?

*Start building relationships!* Relationships are the key to successful alumni interactions and events. Announce the establishment of the new alumni organization on the school's Web site, in newsletters, social networks and direct mail. Plan an event to inaugurate the new group.

*Events are important!* Depending upon the particular school, budgets always raise their ugly heads. Be creative! Events can be as simple as punch and cookies or cold cut sandwiches and chips (think “Subway”). Find out if anyone in your alumni core group has access and or discounts to items needed for an event. Make sure it is a comfortable area conducive to small group interaction. If you have a food service, get a quote from them for the event. An event must have attendees. Invite early and often on every avenue. Get the word out! Make sure the staff knows what the event is about and invite them also. Including everyone fosters teamwork and increases your volunteer pool for future events.

*Plan carefully.* Delegate small tasks to each member. Don't overwhelm the new alumni group with labor-intensive activities. Once again, this can kill enthusiasm. Let each member feel good about successfully accomplishing a

small task. All the successfully executed small tasks will result in a well organized and executed event. Give each attendee a small gift. Creativity comes into play once again. If you have a bookstore, try to get some inexpensive items donated. Purchase items if funds are available. It doesn't have to be a major gift. Some schools use coasters, bookmarks, T-shirts, key chains or school event tickets if that applies. A drawing for a door prize is always nice (offer a good prize and they will come). Once again, your members may have connections to donated items. The important thing is to plan carefully, delegate, execute and have fun! A video playing of school events, successes, or "a message from our president" are all good conversation starters. A mini-program presented by the alumni board explaining the purpose of the group would be appropriate. As the alumni group grows, video programs of alumni from previous years are always a huge hit! Be sure to include instructors in your invitation list. Take lots of photos! Post them on the Web site. Give alumni a reason to come back and reconnect.

*Don't forget to FOLLOW UP!* Administration or the alumni director should send handwritten notes to all new board members and volunteers. E-mails are acceptable. Make sure they are made aware of your appreciation. A registration table at the event should capture all pertinent information on each attendee including address, employer, e-mail, and cell phone number. Contact each attendee. Ask for feedback. Inquire if he/she would like to volunteer.

*Celebrate your success!* Never get so bogged down in the process that the group fails to celebrate successes. Everyone wants to be a part of a successful event.

When everyone has a good time, they will want to come again. If the alumni group had fun planning and executing

the event and feels appreciated, they will want to do it again and have even better ideas the next time.

---

***Celebrate your success! Never get so bogged down in the process that the group fails to celebrate successes. Everyone wants to be a part of a successful event.***

---

### The Results

How will the school benefit from an active alumni community? It will build positive, public recognition of your school. This will lead to easier recruiting due to name recognition and word of mouth advertising. Many alumni groups become involved in community service projects connecting students, alumni and the community. Building relationships takes time. Establishing a vibrant alumni community will pay big dividends, benefiting your school in endless ways...from increased enrollment to potential donors.

A favorite anonymous quote states, "When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things." Build the confidence of the alumni community and you will see amazing results!

# Building Alumni Communities: Short- and Long-Term Plans and Getting Buy-In From Your Constituents

By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates

There are many reasons to create a plan for your alumni community. One is that school leadership will want to know. The other is to research and understand the options, obstacles, challenges, opportunities, tasks, timelines, deadlines, and budget. Not only is budgeting vital, but also what the anticipated return on investment will be. When you have a plan, then you can develop ways to measure progress and results. You'll know how you are doing and what changes need to be made to stay on course.

Some plans start with specific and measurable goals. Examples are:

- 100 active alumni per graduating class
- 30% enrollment referrals
- 20% increase in retention

where alumni assisted in classroom events

- 15% increase in placement when alumni participated in career services events
- 25% increase in alumni referrals to hiring decision-makers where they work
- 1 alumni event per year, per program

Here are suggested areas to "plan" for over a period of 24 months. While it is a challenge to think that far ahead, it is often effective to start with the end in mind.

## *Alumni Advisory Board*

List steps to contact potential board members and get the board set up and functioning.



**DR. SUSAN F. SCHULZ** has been working in the career school sector for nearly 20 years. She is president of Susan F. Schulz & Associates, Inc. and owner of Schools for Sale International, Inc.

Dr. Schulz has become passionate about

the benefits of alumni communities and the impact on career schools as a result of three years of research. She often gives presentations on the solution power of alumni communities and how to set them up on any sized campus.

## **Contact Information:**

Dr. Susan F. Schulz, President  
Susan F. Schulz & Associates

Phone: 561-483-9554

E-mail: [susan@susanfschulz.com](mailto:susan@susanfschulz.com)

*Alumni Department Set-Up*

Create a calendar of activities that will result in your announcement of a full-fledged and functioning alumni department by a certain date.

*Web Site*

Work with the school's IT department to set up a dedicated alumni community Web site that is linked to your main school Web site.

*Student Information Management System*

Work with the school's IT department to ensure that graduates are automati-

---

***The first step is to ask each department what benefits they want to see as a result of the alumni community, and what they are willing to "give" to contribute to its success.***

---

cally turned into alumni status and receive welcome packages, and then ongoing newsletters and other communication.

Ensure that there is the ability to update the records for all alumni to reflect contact with each, their participation in school activities, their requests, etc. The goal is to track alumni, their involvement in the school, referrals they make, names of hiring decision-makers they provide and more. Your system should also be able to evaluate statistics you are measuring such as increases in enrollment, retention, and placement as a result of your alumni community. The system should be able to manage all community outreach efforts.

*Organization*

Set a timeframe to finalize positioning of the alumni community on the school organization chart. Determine reporting order.

*Alumni Director*

Put plans in place to hire from within or seek candidates from outside the school.

*Budget*

Estimate costs to set up and run the alumni community, as well as the expected return on investment.

*Internal Marketing*

Set up strategies to announce benefits of the alumni community to all segments of the campus and to get buy-in from everyone.

*Buy-In and Relationships with Other Departments*

Work with each department to discuss what they want as a result of the alumni community and what they are willing to give to create alumni community success.

*External Marketing*

Set up plans to announce initiation of your alumni program to all segments of the community.

Determine how to work with publicity departments of companies that employ school graduates. Determine how to work effectively with the school marketing and public relations department.

*Alumni Member Benefits*

List all benefits to be offered to alumni.

*Alumni Member Requirements*

List all requests that you plan to make of alumni. (Don't think fundraising.)

*Tasks, Timelines, Deadlines*

Create a calendar showing timelines for all goals and objectives.

---

### *Compliance Issues*

Determine if your regulatory board rules and guidelines impact any aspect of your alumni community.

### *Options, Obstacles, Opportunities, Challenges*

List anticipated roadblocks and then opportunities, so they don't surprise you.

Determine how to deal with the opportunities and challenges of an alumni community.

### *Issuing Reports*

Determine what and how you plan to measure, and how often you will issue reports and to what individuals or groups.

### **Getting Buy-In From the Entire School**

At any organization, whenever there is a new program, initiative, new hire or change, there is resistance, acceptance, cooperation, and other reactions. So it is best to be prepared as you launch or develop your alumni community.

If you have set up an advisory board with members that represent your entire constituency, then you are on your way to getting buy-in. Buy-in means support and cooperation from everyone involved in your school—contribution by everyone. It means that each person views the alumni community as a benefit to them and their departments. It also implies that everyone needs to do his/her part for success. Since logic doesn't always prevail, getting buy-in has its rewards and challenges.

The first step is to therefore ask each department what benefits they want to see as a result of the alumni community, and what they are willing to "give" to contribute to its success.

### *Admissions Department*

An increase in qualified students usually gets the attention of the admissions department. It's therefore important to provide a comprehensive presentation to

admissions staff to explain the benefits of an alumni community. Admissions can clearly benefit from referrals and

introductions to companies that want to train employees. Alumni can give talks to any number of groups such as parents of high school students, high school guidance counselors, hiring managers, and more. Alumni endorsement increases the credibility of your school and the entire career school sector.

You can provide admissions staff with written information and also arrange for alumni to talk with prospects. This can include both formal and informal presentations. The alumni community can be part of the school tour. Assuming the alumni director is doing the job, there should be hundreds of posters throughout your school with graduate success stories.

Challenge the admissions department to test the benefits of talking about the alumni community. Suggest that half of them feature the alumni community in their school tours and admissions interviews. Then ask them to measure enrollment results comparing reps that talked about alumni services to those who did not. Which group enrolled the most students?

What can the alumni community ask the admissions staff? Most important, you want their buy-in and cooperation. You want them to talk up the alumni community. You also want them to be

---

***Most of all you want open communication and ideas, suggestions, comments, critiques, and a teamwork state of mind.***

---

creative about suggestions for alumni services. You want them to tell you about prospective students' concerns and objections—some of which might be addressed by alumni services. You want admissions to think about what they can give you to offer to alumni.

Also what kind of assistance do the admissions people want? Could it be visits from alumni, presentations on the world of work they are experiencing,

stories and information that will help the admissions people do a better job?

Most of all you want open communication and ideas, suggestions, comments, critiques, and a teamwork state of mind.

### *Marketing*

Your school may have a separate marketing department or it may be combined with admissions. Or you might not have anyone handling marketing. There are a lot of cooperative efforts that are possible between marketing and the alumni community. Again, it is a good idea to start with asking the marketing department what benefits they want as a result of the new alumni community. What will increase their success? The alumni community will ideally connect with many people in the community, including the publicity and marketing departments of the companies where grads work. This means that your marketing department can work with local companies in a variety of ways that result in promoting your school, your grads, and the company. For example, events can be planned and publicized; celebrity and non-celebrity grads can be featured—all opening the door to great press potential.

As a well-organized alumni community you will offer many services to alumni, all of which can be publicized by marketing. You will hold many events that can be publicized before, during, and after. Grads can be featured in articles that promote your school. Any results of note generated by students or the school can be the subject of articles.

What does the alumni community want from marketing? Ideas, brainstorming, cooperation, and, of course, creative publicity. You want input on how to develop a highly *search-engine-optimized* Web site. If marketing knows local and national merchants and providers of goods and services, they may be able to get discounts that you can offer to grads.

### *Education*

The staff in your education department has many ways to benefit from an alumni community. They have many offers to provide to add to your list of services and benefits to grads.

What is most on the mind of the staff in education? Probably curriculum, student success, and retention. You can provide education with alumni volunteers who can respond to all these areas. Alumni can review curriculum, equipment, and more, to determine if the curriculum is up-to-date and relevant. Alumni can ask their managers to review curriculum of new programs. This is especially important if regulatory bodies require employer review before launching a new program. Grads can help program staff to identify new training that may be needed in the work place.

Grads can also work with students to increase success and completion rates. Many times a peer can more effectively communicate with a student

---

## ***Grads can also work with students to increase success and completion rates.***

---

than faculty or staff. Grads can also give formal and informal presentations about how skills are used in the work place. And they can talk about life on the job. This often motivates students to complete their studies and get to work. It also takes the fear out of the world of work so students have the self-confidence for the job search.

What do you want from the education department at your school? Again, cooperation and feedback are essential. Are there new skills needed? Is there new technology in their fields? What about ideas for short and long courses to offer people who have been out of school for a long time? Are there courses that alumni can audit that will enhance their ability to gain promotions or salary increases? What are the programs grads should enroll in to take the next steps in their careers?

#### *Student Services*

Student services encompasses many services depending on the school. It can include orientation; study skills; personal, academic, and career counseling; library services; placement; and graduation, to name a few. Where can alumni make a difference to student services staff? The first step is to simply ask them. Assume you have a large group of alumni volunteers. They can assist with any task student services is responsible for starting from orientation through graduation.

What do you want from student services? Mostly you want to know what they are doing and offering that will benefit alumni? What can student services add to your list of benefits to alumni that can be posted on your alumni community Web site? This might include study skill brush-up courses, use of the libraries, and placement services.

Again, you want feedback, ideas, and a way to measure the results of alumni community involvement in student services.

#### *Placement/Career Services*

What does this department really want and how can the alumni community effectively partner with the career services and placement people? Job listings will probably be their number one response. That is exactly what alumni can deliver...ideally, job listings at their place of work before they are published. And the names of the human resource people at local companies that hire your grads.

Placement and career services want people to talk about employment skills needed and the job search process. They need people to run workshops and hold mock interviews. They need help in working with out-of-work grads that need job assistance in a challenging job market.

What do you want from placement? Effective working together and statistics about increased job openings and placements. Also a focus on dedicated career service offerings to all grads—those who are working and want to advance, and those out of a job and feeling disillusioned.

Planning and buy-in are essential when building an alumni community. As you work with each department and key staff you will learn more ways to benefit from your alumni. You will learn about new services to offer alumni that will keep them viewing your school as a lifetime resource.

---

***Planning and buy-in are essential when building an alumni community.***

---

# Integrating an Alumni Community Into Your Organization and Developing an Alumni Advisory Board

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

One of the initial tasks when setting up an alumni community is to determine where your alumni community fits on your organization chart. You may be a single campus school. Or perhaps you have branches. Or maybe you are owned by a large corporation that is located at a distance from your campus. Perhaps the corporation has corporate directors who supervise each campus. There are many looks to a school organization chart.

Therefore the first task is to see how your school is structured. A single campus school is the easiest when adding a position to the organization chart. Multi-campus schools add challenges. There is no right or wrong way to structure your organization chart, however, there are some guidelines. What is important is to place the alumni community on the organization chart where it makes the most sense.

## *Single Campus School*

Typically the alumni community is most effective when it stands alone as a department and reports to only one person such as the campus director, president, or owner. The alumni community can be part of other depart-

ments such as placement, education, student services, or marketing. Sometimes a director of one of these departments can also function as the

---

***What is important is to place the alumni community on the organization chart where it makes the most sense.***

---

alumni director. But, often, that creates challenges and problems, and dilutes the time and effectiveness of a dedicated alumni community director who reports to a key decision-maker.

## *Branch Schools*

Some schools have a main campus plus one or more branches. In this case, it is effective to locate the alumni community at the main campus. The alumni community can run the organization and service each campus. Or a mini-alumni community can be set up in each branch. Usually time evaluation of the set-up helps to determine what is best.

## *Corporate Schools*

Some schools are set up with a corporate office that has oversight

over all its campuses. There may be one corporate or regional director of education for example. That person oversees all directors of education at each campus. Following this structure, a corporate alumni community can be set up at the corporate office. If there is a “corporate” school nearby or at the same location, the corporate school can be the first one to offer alumni

---

***The goal is to keep advisory board members active, engaged, and spreading the word about your new alumni community.***

---

services. What works effectively in the corporate environment is when one school is fully set up and offers an alumni program.

When there is a successful model template, then alumni programs can be launched at other campuses.

Bottom line is that there is no “right” structure. However, when an alumni community functions independently it seems to have the best success. What also adds to success is when only one alumni community is set up at a time. Regardless of the skills and knowledge the director has, there is a certain amount of trial and error that is required. Another ingredient to success is when the alumni director reports directly to a decision-maker who can make certain decisions without too many layers of decision-makers involved. Keep in mind that any plans presented by the alumni director have been carefully reviewed by many knowledgeable members of the alumni advisory board.

### **Setting up an Alumni Advisory Board**

Advisory boards provide many solutions and opportunities. You probably already have advisory boards for the school or for your programs. One solution advisory boards address is the challenge of getting buy-in from

your constituency. A way to get buy-in is to be sure that your advisory board has representatives from all areas of your school—staff, instructors, directors, students, grads, employers, and more.

There are many other opportunities that result from a well-selected advisory board. You get the free advice of many people who can offer valuable input and solutions to the challenges you will face. Selected carefully, you will have answers from just about every perspective—inside the school, from the community, from “users” of your services (your students and grads), and more.

We suggest that you invite everyone to volunteer for the advisory board. Be sure you have at least one to two people representing your staff, faculty, corporate (if you have a multi-campus school), companies that hire your grads, potential employers, interested members of the community, and, of course, graduates.

Your worst problem will be that you have too many advisory board members! And that probably will not happen. Even if everyone volunteers, the reality is that many people drop out. So in the end, you’ll have an advisory board made up of people who want to serve and are ready and willing to contribute.

How often should the advisory board meet? A guideline is: often enough to get the feedback, ideas, and advice you need, but not too often to cause members to leave. One strategy is to plan two to three in-person meetings to start. That is when you’ll need a lot of involvement from advisory board members. And you’ll need the time for members to bond and feel comfortable with each other. After all, you want them functioning as a group for a long time.

Once there has been bonding (and also drop out), it will be time to switch to other meeting formats. This includes

conference calls. This is where each participant is provided with a phone number and access code to dial in to the meeting at a specified time. (There are many conference call services. Your school may already use one.) Be sure to email an agenda before each meeting and keep to the announced timeframe. Usually 30 to 60 minutes is appropriate.

After the call be sure to email minutes and ask for further feedback. List decisions that were made, actions to be taken, and other agreements and timelines. Think about giving “assignments” to advisory board members. They can tell their constituents about the alumni community at your school

and get feedback and ideas to pass along to the group.

In addition to conference calls, you can also send group e-mails with information, announcements, and requests for information and advice. You might also want to set up blogs and text messages. If your school uses other social media and communication technology, this is the time to use it to stay in touch with your advisory board. The goal is to keep advisory board members active, engaged, and spreading the word about your new alumni community.

# Hiring an Alumni Community Director

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

**I**t is important to assign the best possible alumni director to launch and/or develop an alumni community at your campus. There are many approaches. One is to assign a current employee to the job. Typically, it would be someone who has successfully run your placement department, internship/externship department, marketing, education, or even admissions. Sometimes the best alumni director comes from outside the school.

One could argue that the director must have career school experience. On the other hand, someone with alumni experience in other education sectors might be effective. Or someone who is a great communicator, leader, or who has been in job recruiting or community outreach programs could be effective.

## **Job Description**

Here is a sample job description. It can be modified for your school. Comments in parenthesis ( ) provide more information as appropriate.

## **Job Title**

Director of Alumni Community  
(The director title emphasizes the importance of the alumni community and the role within the school.)

## **Type of Company**

Postsecondary career school or college

## **Location**

(your city and state)

## **Education Level**

Bachelor's degree, preferably in business, marketing, or communications

## **Experience**

Five years successful marketing experience.

Two years director-level postsecondary career school or college experience in student services, placement, or career services.

Alumni experience a plus.

(This job description is open and will bring more candidates, some of whom may not be qualified and others that you hadn't expected to be effective.)

## **Position Description**

A xxxxxxxx held company of career schools and colleges with campuses throughout the U.S. has an opening for a dynamic leader to serve as director of alumni community. The company consists of xx campuses throughout xxxxxx. (This is where you describe the structure of your school.)

The director of alumni community is responsible for setting up and developing an alumni group at one specific site, creating a “model” community, and then launching alumni groups at other campuses.

(This sample is designed for a corporate school with many campuses and can be adapted to single campus schools or those with branches.)

### ***Duties and Responsibilities***

- Adhere to all school policies and procedures established by the school.
- Ensure that all systems and operations comply with all local, state, and federal regulations that impact on the school.
- Create and implement a “plan” to set up one model alumni community to start and then roll out groups at other campuses.
- Direct, lead, and manage daily operations to ensure success of plan.
- Set up an advisory board that represents a broad school and community constituency.
- Collaborate with advisory board to establish mission statement, objectives, goals, strategic plan, budget, policies, practices, and actions that lead to desired results.
- Analyze organization chart to confirm where alumni community is placed.
- Obtain buy-in from all other departments.
- Set up a formal method of collaboration with all departments by determining their needs and goals and how an alumni community can meet them.
- Determine what each department (and corporate office as appropriate) is willing to “give” to alumni such as lifelong career services, use of campus and online libraries, course audits, special training, etc.
- Determine membership benefits to be made available to alumni members.
- Secure benefits from the community and nationwide as appropriate.
- Determine how alumni can impact on each department such as referrals to admissions, job shadowing and student mentoring for education, and names of hiring decision-makers for placement.
- Establish method to track and measure results from impact of alumni community on enrollment, retention, placement, and other areas of school.
- With Web developer, set up a dedicated alumni community Web site; link to school Web site and establish methods for ongoing updates.
- Set up and monitor all social networking opportunities such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
- Organize and run events.
- Work with school marketing and public relations staff to coordinate publicity and establish relationships with public relations departments where grads work.
- Work with IT department to ensure that alumni records are available to track status, serve alumni, send e-mailings and other marketing materials, gather information and provide results.

- Analyze return on investment.
- Issue monthly, quarterly, and annual reports.
- Ensure that the department provides high-level service to promote exceptional alumni and student satisfaction.

### ***Qualifications***

- Five years successful director-level marketing and sales experience.
- Two years director-level post-secondary career school or college experience.
- Alumni experience a plus.
- Ability to get buy-in from constituency.
- Experience in community outreach initiatives.
- Ability to interact with top management and community leaders.
- Strong interpersonal communications and presentation skills.

- Outstanding verbal and written communications skills.
- Ability to use constituency relationship management software and other computer programs and applications used by company.
- Strong management, leadership, and organizational skills.
- Excellent professional appearance and demeanor.
- Self-motivated and able to work on own.

### ***Benefits***

(fill in your school benefits)

### ***About the Company/School***

(add something about your school)

### ***Submit Resume and Cover Letter to***

(add contact name and contact information)

---

**Career  
Education  
REVIEW**

# Building a Dedicated Alumni Web Site

*Based on an interview with June Gudeman, Pima Medical Institute*

***Dedicated Web sites for alumni are key to running a successful alumni community,*** claims June Gudeman, who has been spearheading PMI's alumni community for the past eight years. The following outlines June's secret to success and shows why the alumni Web site is THE connection to grads and a great method for two-way communication between PMI alumni and the school.

June and her team are currently updating their alumni Web site. She started by seeking answers to these key questions: What are alumni looking for? What can PMI offer to benefit this valuable population? It's important to provide services and create hooks to entice grads to use the alumni Web site. Therefore the Web site has three key sections:

## 1. Register Now

In order to participate in the



**JUNE GUDEMAN** is the alumni coordinator for Pima Medical Institute. She began seven years ago, creating PMI's alumni program from the ground up. She focuses much of her efforts on gathering alumni success stories and creatively sharing them with prospective and current students, as well as the PMI staff and community at large. Last year she created campus teams (representing admissions, career services, administration, and student services) to plan local alumni events to encourage an ongoing relationship with PMI



Alumni Web site homepage.

alumni community, grads are required to “register” and complete a profile. Getting a profile with updated address, email and other contact information is of great value to any school and a lot easier than paying companies to search for lost grads. This is especially important for Gainful Employment.

## 2. Alumni Community

Once registered, grads can participate in the alumni community. Graduates can search the alumni directory and send messages to

graduates. Her recent focus has been recreating and improving the PMI alumni Web site, including a special emphasis on career services.

June earned a master's degree in education from University of Illinois and a bachelor of arts from Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill. Prior to her work in the career college arena, she taught and coached at the high school level for 10 years.

### Contact Information:

June Gudeman, Alumni Coordinator  
Pima Medical Institute  
Phone: 520-323-5984  
E-mail: [jgudeman@pmi.edu](mailto:jgudeman@pmi.edu)  
Web site: [alumni.pmi.edu](http://alumni.pmi.edu)

their classmates. They can also request an official transcript. Many alumni are drawn to the site for this service. Campus staff is trained to direct alumni to the site for all transcript requests. The benefit to PMI is updated alumni information, and grads have the opportunity to learn about and check out all the services offered by the alumni community.

### 3. Career Services

These Web pages provide information for job seekers. This includes job postings, plus a career services Learning Center with videos, Webinars, and a tip of the week in the form of a Q & A. It allows job seekers to view one-minute videos on job search strategies or Webinars detailing important information about the job search

process. Employer Insights include tips from employers detailing what they are looking for in a new hire and, specifically, why they look to PMI for staffing. Besides all the resources, the Web site provides grads with contact information for the career services advisors at all the PMI campuses.

June reports that an important benefit of the Web site is gathering alumni success stories. When a student posts a profile, it gives her the opportunity to get in touch with the grad and ask for more photos and details about their success, focusing particularly on their rise from a struggling student to a successful career person. Grads are asked for their permission to create a poster. ***PMI is developing an incredible reputation with its success stories that are posted in the lobbies and hallways of all***

***thirteen campuses.***

June reports that often when grads are asked for permission to create their success story poster, they'll tell her about their first day at PMI sitting in the lobby reading the alumni success posters and thinking—*someday I'll be on a poster!* The success story points to CEO Dick Luebke's philosophy that "the only real measuring stick of a school's success is the achievement of its students." For that reason, the icon of the alumni Web site is its success stories.

Success stories are also shared with faculty and staff to show their impact on students past and present. The stories

**PMI ALUMNI SUCCESS STORY**

*I Will Be Forever Grateful*

*"I was a 20 year old single mother of two, barely scraping by, when I decided to go to Pima Medical Institute for an Associates Degree in Radiography. The instructors were wonderful and caring. I was already using every kind of government assistance I could to get through school, but my instructors informed me that PMI could offer additional help. Not only do they have a food bank year round, but they even did a toy drive to help the families of students at Christmas. PMI never failed to help me when I needed it. I graduated in 2007 and got a job immediately in my chosen field. Since then, I have been able to make my way in the world and raise my children on my own. Pima Medical Institute completely changed my life, and I will be forever grateful!"*

**- Amber Remer**  
Radiography Program  
Main Campus  
Graduated 2007

Read more stories from real PMI grads online at [alumni.pmi.edu](http://alumni.pmi.edu)

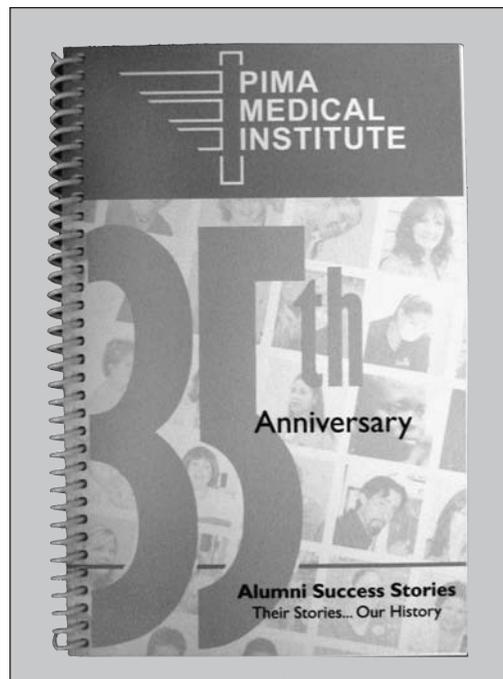
**PIMA MEDICAL INSTITUTE**  
Trusted. Respected. Preferred.

Alumni success story poster.

are used in e-newsletters and other publications, and, of course, for public relations. The success stories are also published in a book. The first book was published for PMI's 35th anniversary. This year marks the 40th anniversary of PMI, and June hopes to be able to publish another success-story book by the end of the year. These books tell more about PMI than anyone can convey. There is incredible power in sharing stories.

June also talked about return on investment (ROI). It is important to gather information about the results of the alumni community initiative and dedicated Web site. ***As a result of the Web site there are now 5,000 profiles of grads that are continually getting updated.*** For schools searching for graduate information, you know how important this is. This means alumni contact information gets updated by the grads. There is no cost to the school to hire staff or special services to locate them. There are also over 100 success story posters hanging in thirteen PMI campuses. In addition, students and grads have learned that the PMI alumni community is the place for answers. June's contact information is on the Web site and she promptly directs all questions to the appropriate departments.

What does PMI want from its alumni community? What is important to PMI is important to every career school: Referrals. In fact, the alumni Web site has a "Click Here" button for viewers to easily make a referral. Grads are walking, breathing advertisements and satisfied alumni have a lot to say. Keeping alumni happy is the best brand of marketing. PMI also provides information for grads to enroll in online and advanced programs at the school. PMI is also continually searching for instructors for its growing enrollment. Alumni are a great source for school staffing and educators.



PMI's 35th anniversary success stories book.

Often career schools understand the benefits of a dedicated alumni community Web site, but lack the funds. *Don't give up – just start small*, says June. A simple, no-frills Web site can be developed using the many commercial Web site templates that are available. If that is still too expensive or difficult, then Facebook can be used in similar ways to a dedicated alumni Web site. It is possible to post success stories, ask alumni to share their stories, establish communication, post questions and answers and more. Of course it is important to have someone from the school monitor the Facebook page. Once Facebook pages gather momentum, it may be easier to convince school decision-makers to see the value of and find the funds for a dedicated full-service Web site.

To view the Pima Medical Institute alumni Web site, simply go to [alumni.pmi.edu](http://alumni.pmi.edu).

# Harnessing Alumni Communities with Social Media

By Robert Starks Jr., MaxKnowledge, Inc.

Alumni are the output of an institution; therefore, they are the ultimate proof of success in an institution's ability to fulfill its mission. As such, alumni can be the greatest competitive advantage for an institution. Happy alumni can become brand advocates. We see career colleges embrace alumni partners as advocates when alumni are featured in commercials, show up at Hill Day to lobby against Gainful Employment legislation, and when they sign e-petitions in support of academic choice. It is self-evident that alumni relationships are valuable and that alumni, serving as brand advocates, create a competitive advantage for the institution. Do career colleges, however, fully understand the benefits of maintaining alumni relationships?

Alumni are another label to categorize a customer of the institution. The difference between alumni and students is that alumni have completed their training. Should the end of training, however, be the end of the relationship? No. Career colleges need to view alumni as a representation of their brand as well as a customer. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is what this is about. CRM is nothing new

for career colleges because we see how relationships are managed during the buying cycle—moving prospective students from awareness to enrollment. How is your institution's CRM strategy continued beyond the buying cycle? Does it end at enrollment?

Career colleges collect employment data and conduct graduate satisfaction surveys, but these activities are not

---

***Career colleges that recognize the value of managing relationships from prospect to graduate and become early adopters of social media technologies, will position themselves to sustain a competitive advantage in the future.***

---

representative of an alumni CRM strategy. These surveys are simply required activities for continued accreditation. The career college sector needs to see alumni as a critical part of its CRM strategy and focus on long-term benefits of alumni partnerships. Perhaps institutions that realize the importance of engaging their alumni just don't know where to begin. This is where social media can be a solution.

Social media offers an amazing solution for several reasons. First, social media tools are designed to facilitate collaboration and engagement. Thus, social media platforms are perfect for building and engaging alumni communities. Second, social media is a preferred platform for millions to socialize as evidenced by the growth of social networks and the amount of time they command in consumer consumption. According to comScore's 2012 U.S. Digital Future in Focus report, social networking accounted for 16.6 percent of all online minutes at the end of 2011 and was on track to become the most engaging online activity in 2012. Finally, social media is not only pervasive; it is also scalable. This makes social media an efficient tool to be used in a Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) strategy for alumni regardless of an institution's size or organizational framework. Leveraging social media to reconnect with alumni is a smart beginning to adopting a SCRM strategy. Now, institutions need to consider how they can manage the relationships with their students from prospect to alumni. Academic Social Networks can be a solution to this challenge.

An Academic Social Network (ASN), also referred to as an Academic Engagement Network (AEN), is a private, social network that transports the postsecondary education experience to the virtual space. The advantages of an ASN/AEN is that it centralizes campus engagement, streamlines campus communications, builds a

stronger campus community, and uses a virtual social platform that students prefer. This type of network provides institutions with a true SCRM infrastructure from which to continue engaging students as they transition to the alumni community. Alumni communities can be a source for new leads, graduate success stories, employer relationships, advisory board membership, guest speakers, mentorship programs, and can even act as a talent pool from which to recruit faculty and staff. These are just a few benefits.

Career colleges that recognize the value of managing relationships from prospect to graduate and become early adopters of social media technologies, will position themselves to sustain a competitive advantage in the future. The University of Phoenix recently announced their own academic social network, which already engages over 150,000 constituents. It will be interesting to see how the career college sector will utilize social media in the future and if alumni communities will become a growing part of organizational strategy.

For those wanting to learn more about social media or establishing an alumni program, MaxKnowledge has two courses on these topics including Developing a Social Media Strategy for Career Services and Setting up an Effective Alumni Association. Both courses are listed at [www.maxknowledge.com](http://www.maxknowledge.com).

# Building Alumni Communities Through Social Networking

By Janet Preloger, Academy of Art University

Staying connected is the basis of any alumni association. Opportunities to network, exchange ideas, and share information give alumni a reason to stay involved with their alma maters and continue a relationship with their former classmates well beyond graduation. Using social media tools to build alumni communities is a practical way to share information, expand career networks, share success stories, and expand an alumni association's database of resources. Having a community of alumni at your fingertips through social media enhances the alumni experience and gives schools the tools to stay connected.

## Sharing Information

Sharing news, promoting events, and directing traffic to college Web sites and blogs is a simple way to start building a community on a social networking



**JANET PRELOGER** is the director of alumni at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, the nation's largest private visual art and design school. With over 25,000 graduates around the globe, Janet is responsible for all outreach initiatives of the university's alumni association. Prior to

site. Establish an online presence that makes the group a one-stop shop for graduates to learn about what's

---

***Establish an online presence that makes the group a one-stop shop for graduates to learn about what's happening at their alma mater and stay up to date with benefits offered.***

---

happening at their alma mater and stay up to date with benefits offered. The more information you share on a regular basis, the more active the group becomes and the more likely it is to grow.

## Professional Networking

It's who you know – that's a phrase we hear all too often. But with today's technology, using LinkedIn to build

working at the Academy, Janet spent several years in fundraising and special event planning at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and Lyric Opera of Chicago. She is also a classically trained singer.

## Contact Information:

Janet Preloger, Director of Alumni  
Academy of Art University  
San Francisco, CA  
Phone: 1-800-544-2787, ext. 8350  
E-mail: [jpreloger@academyart.edu](mailto:jpreloger@academyart.edu)

valuable business connections can be a smart move towards knowing the right someone and getting your foot through the door. Facilitating a professional networking group for alumni from similar industries is a great way to engage graduates. The group can be a venue for networking your way into your dream job, or finding an accomplished professional to fill an open position.

When grads move to a new city, they can alert group members in that

---

***Social networking groups also provide a great venue for collaborating, conversing, and sharing ideas with professionals who share common interests and are experts in their fields.***

---

geographical area that they are looking for employment in a specific field. For example, the Academy of Art University has a large alumni group in the New York

area. When a new graduate relocates to New York, they can simply go to the LinkedIn group, find members who live in the area, and connect. Not all connections prove successful, but you never know where one door might lead.

Maybe you're a photographer who is looking to hire a Web designer to design your new Web site. Go to the LinkedIn group, post what you're looking for, and before long take your pick from a cast of very talented Web designers. The Academy of Art University has an active online job board for students and alumni listing a variety of opportunities around the globe. Highlighting opportunities of interest for alumni through social networking channels keeps many engaged in visiting the group often.

### **Storytelling, Collaborating and Sharing Ideas**

A great marketing tool for any institution is the storytelling of its graduates'

paths to success. Whether it's a human-interest story documenting a Cambodian refugee who has blossomed into a talented filmmaker, or a fashion designer whose entrepreneurial spirit has built a world-renowned denim company, people like a good story. And there's no better way to share a story than to post a link on a social networking site. This is a great way to tell the school's story through its graduates and get the word out.

The alumni newsletter readership at the Academy of Art University has grown significantly over the last several years, in line with the enhanced popularity of social media. Posting a link to a success story to the alumni group can open the door to an increased audience that may have not received the newsletter by mail, expanding the audience with each post.

Social networking groups also provide a great venue for collaborating, conversing, and sharing ideas with professionals who share common interests and are experts in their fields. When alumni need some feedback from a group of peers on their latest documentary film, they simply post a link to an audience of professional artists and designers for advice.

### **A Resource for Alumni Professionals**

Database management is a challenge for any alumni association administrator. People relocate, change jobs, update email addresses, get married and change names—all making the management of contact information a challenge. The larger your social networking groups, the more access you have to these graduates who all too often fall off the school's radar.

Another obstacle is tracking the employment status of graduates. For many schools, the accreditation process requires the tracking of alumni

employment data. The research that can be done on LinkedIn alone is a benefit to many alumni department administrators. Not only can you view where a graduate is currently working, but you can often learn about employment histories, awards and honors, education gained outside of your institution, and even link to personal Web sites to learn more.

Building communities for alumni using these free social networking resources is a positive way to add value

to the alumni experience and stay connected with graduates long after they have a diploma in hand. Using a variety of these tools—LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and so on—helps expand your audience while providing a centralized location to interact with the school's extended family. It's a small world after all, and social networking tools have made the world even smaller.



# The Role of Alumni in Service Learning

By Gary Meers, MaxKnowledge, Inc.

A service-learning program can make numerous contributions to the education of students, provide assistance to communities, and sustain connections with alumni. The goal of service learning is a set of outcomes at the conclusion of the learning experience. These outcomes vary for the students, the recipients of the service efforts, and the hosting community.

## Service Learning Benefits for Alumni

- Transfers knowledge and skills from the classroom to the community. Engages alumni in real and positive ways and allows them to “practice” their skills under supervision while expanding their expertise and enhancing their resumes.
- Promotes teamwork and citizenship. Collaboration provides experience in the challenges of

working with individuals and groups that come from diverse settings.

- Involves alumni in problem solving in the specific context of the service activity and the community. Addresses complex problems in complex settings rather than in

---

***A service-learning program can make numerous contributions to the education of students, provide assistance to communities, and sustain connections with alumni.***

---

isolation. All this has real world application that can help on the job.

- Provides critical-thinking skills to identify issues and repeated opportunities to develop these skills.



**DR. GARY MEERS** is currently the vice president of education at MaxKnowledge, Inc. His background in career education includes research, consulting and training in the areas of instructor performance, curriculum development, classroom management, student motivation,

learning and assessment. He has authored over 100 articles and conducted over 500 workshops on instructional improvement and professional

development. Dr. Meers started his career as a vocational instructor, progressing to become a professor of education and human sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has devoted his professional life to the improvement of instruction for all students.

## Contact Information:

Dr. Gary Meers  
Vice President of Education  
MaxKnowledge, Inc.  
3943 Irvine Blvd. #262  
Irvine, CA 92602  
Phone: (888) 626-2407, x.86  
E-mail: garym@maxknowledge.com

- Generates emotional consequences as individuals are invested in the outcomes.
- Strengthens social responsibility and allows alumni to see themselves as contributors for the common good.
- Builds self-confidence to seek job promotions and raises.

The categories of service learning are academic, direct, indirect, and advocacy.

**Academic service learning** relates to specific courses that alumni may

assist with. Together with the instructor, assignments can be created such as coaching, mentoring, teaching skills, or working one-on-one to increase student

---

***By making service learning a part of the curriculum, students will understand the value of continuing this focus long after they graduate.***

---

success. The benefit to alumni is more enhanced knowledge about the subject matter, plus leadership and management.

**Direct service learning** is a common format for service learning. It provides experiences and diversity of opportunities at the institution. **Indirect service learning** starts with a plan working with institution leaders. An example of indirect service is when graduates get involved with the state association of schools and colleges and work on political action and lobbying projects. It starts with a plan developed by the school and dependent on political issues in the state.

Alumni involved in service learning should be encouraged to document their involvement and write up their projects along with the successes and challenges. All this can be used to enhance resumes and experience. It shows leadership skills that can be presented during job interviews.

Another form of service learning is advocacy. **Advocacy service learning** helps individuals or groups advocate for themselves or their issues. For example, an advocacy service-learning project working with unemployed or underemployed individuals could help develop “soft skills” and “job readiness.”

Advocacy service learning helps alumni learn how to work in different community settings and develop articulate and effective communication skills with different audiences. It helps alumni network with community leaders who might eventually hire these grads.

### **Alumni Perceptions**

Alumni can be effective promoters and ambassadors for their career college. This assumes they have had good experiences and feel prepared to be successful in the work place. The responsibility for student success and satisfaction is the focus of all those involved with the institution, from admissions through career services. Faculty serves as the primary developers of positive alumni since students spend ninety percent of their time with them.

While in school, students form opinions about the institution and the level of association they will maintain after graduation. It is essential that the institute focus on earning student respect by developing rapport as they become alumni. Alumni will then see the value they can bring to the students that follow them. Recent grads understand how they can continue to influence and assist their institution.

One of the ways that this can be done is to incorporate service learning into the curriculum. By making service learning a part of the curriculum, students will understand the value of continuing this focus long after they

---

graduate. This mentality sets the stage for keeping grads involved and connected with their institution.

### **Service Learning Using Alumni**

Alumni that have participated in service learning while students will be receptive to the idea of inviting students to visit their work sites. Alumni can help identify service-learning opportunities in their communities. These grads know how service learning works and how projects are organized. This is a great benefit for the service-learning coordinator. The coordinator can set up new service-learning projects quicker because the concept of service learning is already understood by alumni who participated while students.

Expanded networking opportunities occur when alumni identify potential service-learning sites. The college benefits from these connections as potential placement sites. Career services staff is constantly looking for new companies to contact for placement. Access to networks that alumni are connected to expands outreach opportunities. For the alumni, being a part of the college network and maintaining an ongoing relationship with the college expands their connections as well. All this increases their potential for employment and career growth.

Using alumni to identify potential service-learning projects and sites is valuable. Alumni live and work in their communities and are able to target the greatest need levels there. When the college seeks community service-learning projects they can generate support because alumni know that the project will meet a high level of need. The communities realize the value that

can come from the students' effort, but also see the benefits alumni and the college bring.

Alumni that are experienced in service learning can share their experiences with pre-service-learning students. Students get to hear from and interact with alumni that have completed service-learning projects. Students get to observe graduates that are successfully using their

education to achieve their career goals. This interaction is inspiring for all those involved. Students see individuals that are modeling successful career

growth. Alumni have the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping the next generation of students enter their careers.

Career colleges have long used advisory committees to provide input on such areas as course content, laboratory equipment, and support resources. Alumni are frequently asked to serve on these committees. Many do since they see their service as giving back to the college that helped them progress on their career paths. By involving alumni in the service learning outreach, their role is expanded beyond advisory committee participation. This allows more targeted alumni input and participation in the students' service-learning projects.

Service learning is a community outreach effort that benefits students and the community being served as well as alumni and their college.

---

***Service learning is a community outreach effort that benefits students and the community being served as well as alumni and their college.***

---

# The Impact of Alumni Communities on State Associations and PACs

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

## ***Change Is a Given***

We have all learned that change is a given. We can hold on to the past. We can ignore it. Or we can choose to drive the exciting ride to make a difference. We are amidst the re-imagining of career schools. Tomorrow this sector will look different to survive. The change may be from an enrollment culture to a service culture reflected in student/staff ratios, alumni activity, and NPS scores, as examples. (The Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a loyalty metric that tracks how customers represent a company to their friends, associates, etc.) This consumer representation is free marketing that greatly influences business growth.

## ***Alumni Communities Will Make That Impact***

Alumni communities will make that difference. Alumni communities and not alumni associations. Alumni associations conjure up homecoming, football games, and definitely expect a request for a check. This is not what career school alumni communities are all about.

## ***The Engagement of Alumni***

Engage alumni in “service learning” by inviting grads to assist in the classroom, coach students, hold mock

interviews, sit on advisory boards, and gain leadership skills while they are giving their time and talents to our schools and state associations. Visit them at the workplace and keep in

---

***Engage alumni because they can become forceful advocates for your schools, associations, and the career school sector.***

---

touch, so they will tell school placement departments about job openings, workplace training needs, and other information to ensure career school programs meet the needs of the companies where graduates are placed.

## ***Alumni Expectations***

Students want to know they are still important and appreciated long after they graduate. This requires offering alumni many benefits. Examples include lifelong career services, the ability to sit in on classes, complete continuing education courses, get involved in project and program leadership opportunities, receive local and national discounts, scholarships, awards and rewards, recognition, networking, and attend frequent social events and

activities. Career schools promote the “cradle to grave” student services concept requiring the school to do more for students after they graduate.

Engage alumni because they can become forceful advocates for your schools, associations, and the career school sector. Alumni are the new resources in matters that concern our sector the most.

### **State Association Issues and How Alumni Communities Can Respond**

The following summarizes some major issues state associations face and how alumni communities can address them. The information was gained through interviews with over 15 state association leaders.

#### ***Association membership; getting members involved and getting them to stay involved***

A goal of state associations is to motivate schools to join, renew their membership, and get involved and stay active. In some states, real estate and H&R Blocks are required to be licensed. These training centers share little or no common issues with career schools. Therefore, while they are licensed entities, they are not viable association members. In addition, when student enrollment is down, schools may be reluctant to renew association membership, further reducing the member pool.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Active alumni show the viability of the career school sector and motivate non-member schools to join.
- Alumni can provide bodies and talent when school leaders lack time. Alumni can assist associ-

ation staff as part of service-learning projects.

- Alumni can help clarify the difference between taking classes at “H&R Blocks” and career training.
- If state associations sponsor training on how to set up alumni communities, schools will view their state association as a resource and want to join.

#### ***Legislator awareness; reaching the newly elected and staying in touch with all***

Getting state legislators to understand and appreciate the career school sector is a major challenge. There is a need for many voices to tell the career school story in a positive light. This is especially an issue when there are elections and new legislators are voted in and need to be educated.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni can function as lobbyists, host events, follow up, and provide the extra hands when addressing legislative issues. They can be forceful advocates supplying voices, votes, and petition signatures.
- Alumni success stories can serve as endorsements for the career school sector.
- Graduates who have reached high-level places in the community can use their personal influences.
- The power of alumni is a great asset, resource, and part of political mobilization. Imagine if the first calls or tweets legislators and the press receive after some negative announcements are from alumni

who are also leaders in their communities.

- Alumni may be a source for funds although fundraising is not the concept of the career school alumni community.
- Alumni involvement gives graduates experience to add to their resumes and hones their leadership skills.

### ***Overcoming negative press, a constant media battle***

The media is very persistent in blasting career schools using TV, print, and billboards with messages such as “Trade up from Trade Schools.” States also report negative spillover from national press. It is a constant battle to get the media to present good news and counter the accusations that portray career schools as quickly enrolling students and then leaving graduates unemployed and in debt.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Student success stories are testimonials to the value of career schools. Alumni stories may eventually change the expectation of the media and the way they think. Perhaps good news can generate good press to counter the wave of bad press that is generated from bad news.
- Alumni can be the fuel to fight negative press and can function as lobbyists and communicators. Alumni provide proof of quality career school education.
- Alumni endorsements can affect the confidence and awareness of other career school graduates. Proud and confident graduates are more likely to get jobs.

- Faculty and staff are also great advocates. It is a benefit when they learn that they are part of a larger organization and can impact issues facing career schools.

### ***Difficulty in reaching school decision-makers; getting them to respond***

When family schools are sold or converted to corporate schools the state association is challenged with reaching the check writer for financial support and to support local issues.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni from the original school have proven to be a strong force even after the school is sold. A school in south Florida was sold and its name changed. The graduates from that school formed their own alumni association under the original school name and are 2000 members strong via Facebook! They can probably get into the door and gain the ears of the new corporate owners.

### ***Difficulty in obtaining student success stories***

Several state associations count on the endorsement of career schools through student success stories. This requires individual schools to collect and share them, which doesn't easily happen.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni success stories can be obtained from active alumni who can encourage other grads to submit their own success stories.
- These endorsements could go directly to a central bank – or the state association.

***The challenge of maintaining collegial relationships with schools in other sectors of higher education***

In some states career schools, community colleges, and other public and private colleges and universities are pitted against each other. Instead, the focus should be on working in alliance to put the training of the student first.

*Alumni community as solution:*

- Many alumni have experience in several sectors of higher education. A service-learning project can be the development of relationships with community and local colleges with the focus on alliances. It's all about educating the same community!
- Alumni can help promote educational choice and be spokespeople through their presence, voices, and votes.

***The need to speak with one voice***

This issue is about the need to leverage state association relationships with federal policymakers in order to harness political power.

*Alumni community as solution:*

- Activity started on the state level can be transmitted to the national level.

***Intimidation of career school graduates***

Negative press can jeopardize graduates' perceptions of the career education they got or limit their ability to seek employment. Career school graduates who have attained community leadership positions may be afraid to speak out.

*Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni communities can put career schools on a level playing field with other institutions of higher learning.
- When alumni communities are positioned as extremely desirable, it demonstrates that career schools are forward thinking...able and willing to implement new ideas, strategies, and leadership. This can help counter bad press and provide other benefits.

***Dealing with gainful employment and cohort default rates***

While these are challenges individual schools must deal with, state associations are involved. If their member career schools fail, this creates several problems including untrained students, negative press, and fewer member schools.

*Alumni community as solution:*

- Engaged alumni are available to provide information when schools are challenged with finding graduate job placement and salary information.
- Engaged alumni are easily found compared to those the school loses contact with. When schools see that alumni communities impact this research, every school will wish they had one.
- Satisfied alumni are likely to hire from career schools.
- Alumni provide the vehicle for career schools to build employer relationships.
- When the press accuses schools of deceptive placement sta-

tistics, alumni can easily counter with facts.

### ***Career school vulnerability for state funding***

When state budgets are reduced, career schools face the possibility of being eliminated from certain funding.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- State legislators need to see the focus is about putting students first and prepping individuals for the work place. Alumni can foster this.

### ***Career school marketing and questionable admissions practices***

Career schools use a variety of paid marketing strategies. It is often the public relations techniques that support and endorse marketing efforts.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni can serve as the public relations arm and their success stories can address admissions issues.

### ***Overcoming the negativity surrounding the term “for-profit”***

“For-profit career school” may be a demeaning Wall Street term that was never challenged. It has many negative connotations implying that making a profit is a crime.

#### *Alumni community as solution:*

- Alumni can be part of the changing and developing career school landscape.
- The career school sector needs a shift (new ideas and strategies) and alumni communities can be part of that transformation.

### **Motivating and Incentivizing All Career Schools to Set up Alumni Communities**

Why doesn't every career school have an alumni community? Here are some reasons:

- School leaders often believe there is not enough time, staff, funds, or know-how
- Often owners face more pressing priorities
- School leaders believe they need a “recipe” book and go-to source when faced with challenges in setting up an alumni program.

Other reasons for not setting up alumni communities include no one available on staff to head up the alumni initiative, limited funds to hire anyone, or it hasn't been determined who the alumni director reports to. There are endless reasons and other priorities and they are all valid.

Luckily there are career schools who have taken the initiative to set up alumni communities. Many have faced the obstacles and found solutions for the challenges. They have the commitment to stay the course and share what works and what didn't. It will take a while, but the information to build a valuable career school alumni community on any sized campus is possible.

### ***Next Steps***

Many career schools don't have alumni programs, yet are quick to ask alumni for help when it is needed. This mentality needs to change. New students along with graduates need to see that there is an active alumni community at all career schools with many, many benefits. Then it will be easy for graduates to give when asked and even when not asked!

# Career Services for Alumni

*Based on an interview with Amy Soricelli, Berkeley College*

Career services is one of the most vital “group of services” a student can receive during his/her education. Alumni require a specific group of services since their needs are different and must be addressed accordingly. Amy Soricelli, director of alumni career services for Berkeley College (New York City) finds that while job seekers are universal in their quest for employment, alumni bring additional challenges to the search. Berkeley College has been training students since the 1960s. This means that some alumni she meets can be out of school for over 40 years. They require more individual coaching in conjunction with networking opportunities designed primarily for the younger and more recent graduate.

The first and most important step when working with alumni is to determine who they are. Are they coming from specific disciplines or industries? Are they passive job seekers reaching

out to the college for career assistance in addition to other services the college provides? Are your alumni part of the displaced population who are chroni-

---

***To create a comprehensive plan that addresses the specific challenges alumni face, you need to know who your population is and how your career services can best assist them quickly and effectively.***

---

cally unemployed and reaching out to his/her alma mater for much-needed boosts in the career search process? In order to create a comprehensive plan that addresses the many specific challenges alumni face, you need to know who your population is and how your career services can best assist them quickly and effectively.



.....

**AMY SORICELLI** has been in the career services/ placement/ staffing business her entire professional career. As a college student, Amy got her first taste of the placement business as a researcher for an executive search firm. Once graduate school was completed (masters degree in specialized services in education, guidance and counseling) her first professional role was as a placement counselor for the Katharine Gibbs School in New York City where Amy rose in the ranks from counselor to director of placement during her almost 13-year career with the firm.

Eager to see how the other half lived, Amy joined Taylor Grey (Inc. 5000 honoree), a boutique staffing firm where she specialized in placing support staff in a variety of industries. After enjoying an almost 13-year career with Taylor Grey, Amy decided to return to her roots in education and joined Berkeley College as their director of alumni career services.

**Contact Information:**

Amy Soricelli  
Director, Alumni Career Services  
Berkeley College  
3 East 43 Street  
New York, NY 10017  
Phone: 212-986-4343, ext. 4161  
Fax: 212-922-9405  
E-mail: [aps@berkeleycollege.edu](mailto:aps@berkeleycollege.edu)

A checklist used to categorize the many issues alumni face is often an effective tool, suggests Amy Soricelli. “Therefore be ready to ‘check off’ services needed during your initial conversation, so that you can touch on all the key points alumni are concerned with.” Amy asks the basic questions

---

***Alumni need to be engaged physically, mentally and spiritually in the job search process.***

---

such as: Are you currently employed? What was your last job and how long were you there? What happened

there? Once the basics are determined, a more detailed conversation should take place that can touch on who the job seeker is in addition to what he/she is looking for in a position.

The next series of questions must focus on where the graduate is in terms of his/her own search. The answers to these questions will enable the career services professional to assess the level of services the alumnus requires. In this way steps can be taken to bring the alumnus to a more relevant point in the search process. An excellent example of this needs assessment, suggests Amy, is the existence of a LinkedIn profile that is current and impressive. If the alumnus is not on LinkedIn or actively involved in postings and searches, he/she is operating at a disadvantage that is easily and quickly remedied.

If the grad has limited his/her search to antiquated job boards, has a three-page resume that states “References upon Request” on the bottom, and has no idea how to work a career fair, the process with the alumni career services area will be a different experience. “I invite the alumnus in for a face-to-face interview in that case,” states Soricelli, who feels strongly that the one-on-one job coaching experience cannot be understated. “Body language, eye contact and posture are important elements in the hiring process. Career services needs to approach the alumnus as a person seeking a job and not strictly as a “job seeker.”

Once the alumnus has created a “wish list” consisting of the most im-

portant “must have’s” in a new position, the career services professional must assist the alumnus in creating an action plan that is thoughtful, realistic and presents sufficient challenges, so the grad “stretches” a bit and tests the limits of his/her expectations. The process needs to be fun. Often the fear is removed when options are offered and new ways of looking at things are presented in a non-threatening manner.

Alumni need to be engaged physically, mentally and spiritually in the job search process. The more seasoned the alumnus, the greater the need for confidence boosting and attitude “checking.” The world is different now (especially for grads who completed training 20 or more years ago) and the job search process can be daunting and unkind. It is imperative that alumni come back to the school they graduated from. In this way, the isolation of the job search is alleviated and the individual has the opportunity to remove him/herself from the comfort zone of the home computer.

Role-playing and “walk me through this scenario” exercises are very important to the alumni, states Soricelli, who finds that many older grads have as much difficulty navigating a phone interview as she once had figuring out an online application. The phone screen and the group interview are “givens” today. These important steps in the interview process are not “naturals” to the older alumni who must learn to handle each with professionalism and confidence. Working in a group is a confidence booster. That’s why Soricelli suggests bringing a group of alumni together whenever possible, so that they can learn from each other and provide encouragement and support.

Alumni are the backbone of any institution. They are the foundation, the trailblazers—the ones who need assistance and guidance. Their loyalty and respect enable us to continue the important work we do.

# Developing Career Services for Alumni

By Anne Sumangil, Rasmussen College

**K**eeping alumni engaged with their college, while also developing services that address their needs and concerns, is an important strategy for many institutions. This focus can be integrated into developing your career services department. At Rasmussen College, continued career services support and guidance is a popular advantage for alumni. They appreciate the benefit of these services beyond the time they attend classes. Every Rasmussen College campus has a career services advisor who is available to assist alumni with the following services:

- Updating and revising resumes, cover letters, and references
- Portraying alumni effectively to potential employers through mock interviews
- Creating a portfolio of the alumni's professional work
- Navigating career fairs to most successfully spotlight the alumni's skills

- Developing a career plan
- Networking strategies and tactics

## Job Search Preparation

Rasmussen College utilizes a variety of Web-based software to assist our alumni in preparing for their job search. Similar to many colleges, our alumni continue to have access to the resources from our library after they graduate—both online and at any one of our 22 campus locations. Whether it is a book for personal use, an article to reference for a new initiative at the office, or a journal to cite in a graduate school research paper, our libraries help Rasmussen alumni find what they need. Alumni have access to more than 25,000 full-text books, 55 research databases, and 100,000,000 full-text articles available online, as well as over 1,000 resources available on campus.

## Resume Assistance and Online Job Board

Rasmussen alumni also have access



**ANNE SUMANGIL** is the director of the Rasmussen College alumni association where she oversees the alumni strategy for the college's alumni in 21 campuses located in five states. Prior to serving in this role, Anne worked as the director of career and community development at the Rasmussen College

campus in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. Anne has also worked in alumni relations at the University of

Minnesota's Carlson School of Management as well as the University of Minnesota Alumni Association. Anne has a bachelor's degree in management from the College of St. Benedict and a master's degree in education in human resource development from the University of Minnesota.

## Contact Information:

Anne Sumangil, M.Ed.  
Director, Alumni Association  
Rasmussen College  
Direct: 952-830-3816  
Cell: 612-240-0073  
E-mail: Anne.Sumangil@rasmussen.edu

to OptimalResume, an online resource that helps them prepare and format their resumes and cover letters. This service also provides a mock interview resource where students can record themselves answering questions that

---

***Through our alumni career services opportunities we are helping graduates fulfill their goals of obtaining successful careers in their fields of study. Through this experience, we have seen our alumni keep in contact with their advisors and campuses.***

---

are prompted by a pre-recorded and filmed individual. This individual also gives advice on what the most effective responses would be for the questions that are presented. Lastly, this online resource allows alumni to

store the contents of their portfolios, so that all of their job search resources are centrally located. In addition, all alumni have access to Job Connect, an online job board where employers are able to post current job openings solely for Rasmussen students and alumni. Employers simply create a free account to post their job openings, and students and alumni can apply directly from the site.

### **Social Media Exploration**

LinkedIn is also another valuable resource that we invite the alumni to utilize. Rasmussen College alumni have a group available on LinkedIn along with sub-groups for each of our different schools of study. This has allowed us to engage alumni by offering everyone the opportunity to post relevant articles and create discussions and polls to the group. Our group is maintained by the director of the Rasmussen College alumni association and only Rasmussen College alumni, staff, and faculty are able to access the group.

### **Webinars and Other Tools**

In addition to the on-ground and online resources, we also host monthly Webinars for our alumni in order to help them develop professionally and grow in their careers. Examples of hosted Webinars include the following topics:

- CPA Testing and Preparation
- Pain Management
- The World of Mobile Apps
- Managing Student Loans

The Rasmussen College alumni association also partners with Rasmussen College Online. The Online division delivers career-focused Webinars on a quarterly basis on topics like personal branding, writing effective resumes, and networking.

### **Career and Networking Expos**

Rasmussen College is proud to host a National Career and Networking Expo on a bi-annual basis. Each February and August, our campuses invite employers from a variety of fields to recruit our students, alumni, and individuals from our community for open positions. The event is hosted at various times throughout our campus markets in order to maximize available positions to current students, alumni and the community at-large. The Expo is offered at no cost and is open to the public. The college enjoys a great response from our alumni over the years. It is a perfect opportunity for our alumni to network with employers.

Through our alumni career services opportunities we are helping graduates fulfill their goals of obtaining successful careers in their fields of study. Through this experience, we have seen our alumni keep in contact with their advisors and campuses. Alumni often inform the college about job openings at their organizations and teach others the value of a Rasmussen College education.

Rasmussen College graduates enjoy an ongoing relationship with the college that benefits both alumni and the college. It's a two-way street where all benefit.

# Setting Up Your First Alumni Event

*Based on an interview with June Gudeman, Pima Medical Institute*

**T**he first task many career school alumni community leaders think about is running an event. Events are huge undertakings. How can you make them easy-to-implement and successful at your campus? June Gudeman, PMI alumni coordinator for the past eight years, has some advice.

Often we want to engage our alumni, but we approach the event from the standpoint of how it will benefit our institution or alumni association. In reality, we have to consider our graduates. Our goal is to stay connected and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with them. We must realize their time and resources are valuable. Therefore we are wise to consider what might draw them to return and engage with us. In light of this, our focus at PMI events is APPRECIATION. Specifically, events are to show alumni the school still cares about them long after

graduation. Once we've established this theme, the details of who, what, when, and where of planning the event will sift through this grid.

The first step is to set up an alumni event team. Team members might include representatives from all depart-

---

***Our focus at PMI events is APPRECIATION. Specifically, events are to show alumni the school still cares about them long after graduation.***

---

ments—career services, student services, administration, admissions—students, faculty, grads, and even employers. The first meeting is an opportunity to explain the direction and focus, and let the brainstorming begin. The team needs to take ownership and make the event relevant to



their campus. The team needs to brainstorm the “who, what, when, where, and how” of their event. Therefore, it is important to plan your event far enough in advance, so you have plenty of time to get the word out and organize the details.

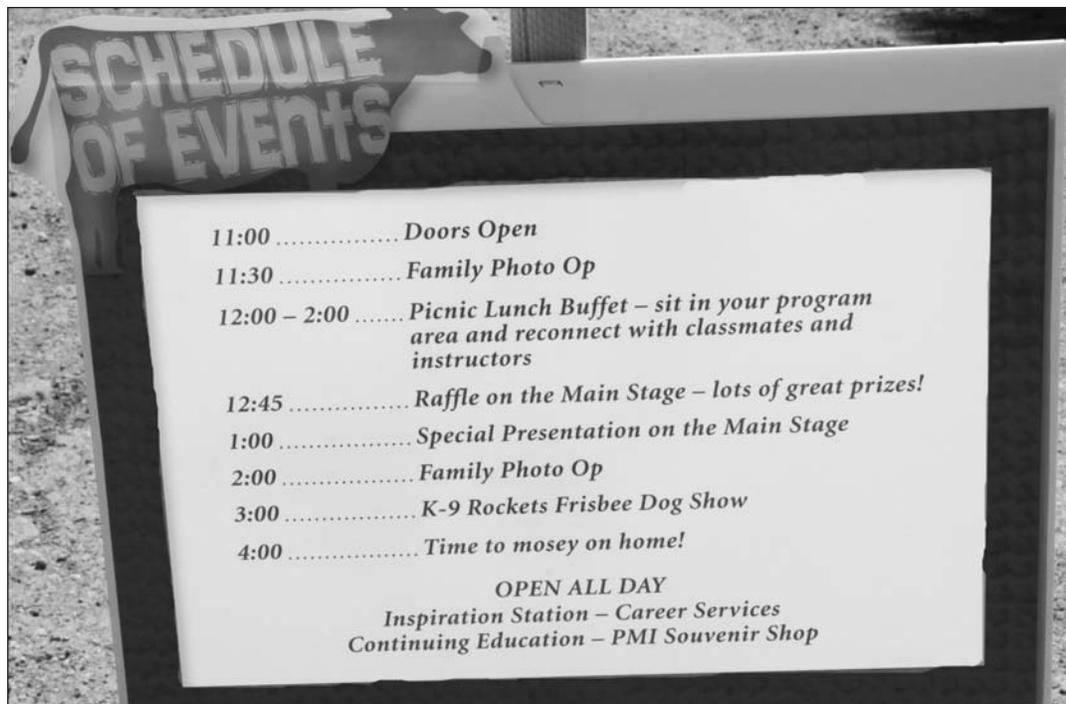
The **who** refers to which grads will be invited to the event. This could be all grads back to the start of the school, or the event could be held just for graduates of certain programs or years and be a smaller group. The “who” may also be about whether just the alumni will be invited or whether the invitation will include spouses or all family members.

The **what** and the **where** depends on the program or party and the expected number of attendees. Therefore, the event could be at the campus (if there is space), a restaurant, hotel, park, or special venue. “What” is about the type of event. Is it a family event? Will there be food and, if yes, what types of food? Will there be a speaker or some formal activity? The **when** is an important decision in attempting to generate as

much participation as possible. The event might be held during the workday or the weekend, or in the evening.

The **how** includes how the event will be promoted to grads and staff, and how the success of the event will be measured. The “how” also relates to promoting the event including e-mail blasts, flyers, visits to employers that hired PMI grads and fliers posted in employer lunch rooms. How will your team evaluate the ROI (Return on Investment)? Will it be based on the number of attendees? Will it be based on new employers or advisory board members you’ve obtained? Will you have a follow-up survey?

June outlined the two alumni events hosted by PMI recently. The first event was run by one campus and was a two-hour open house at an upscale area hotel. Graduates from just one program were invited, along with all faculty and staff that worked at PMI during that time. One of the alumni had graduated in the early ‘80s and others just a few months before the event.



The second event, hosted by another campus, invited all graduates for all programs and invited families. This family event was held at a farm/amusement park. It was very successful as it gave families the opportunity to be together and, at the same time, attend a PMI event.

While the details were different for each event, the underlying focus was appreciation. The emphasis was on having fun and making alumni feel special. PMI's goal was to get updated contact information and employment updates, as well as obtain graduate success stories. Any information gathered from grads was requested at the beginning of the event and then the alumni were left to connect with each other and just party.

There were many techniques that made the events successful. One was that faculty and staff were invited to attend and encouraged to interact with the grads. The team even offered coaching on how to interact and what questions to ask. After the event, instructors were asked to provide feedback regarding the graduates they made connections with. There were also booths set up for career services, admissions, and ongoing education. Information was available and staff could provide details. None of this information was pushed onto the guests.

After the events, Survey Monkey was used to gather feedback. Ninety-seven percent of respondents evaluated the event as very good or excellent. A total of thirty graduate stories were

videotaped at the second event. Career services staff sent letters to every employer represented by an attending graduate and many visited employers during the following week. Unemployed graduates were contacted and offered assistance. New externship sites and job openings were provided by employers. And, there was an increase in calls from employers who offered additional externship sites. Employers also received a letter from PMI thanking them for hiring PMI graduates and inviting them to sit on advisory boards, give speeches, and get involved with PMI in other ways.

While evaluation and Return on Investment (ROI) is always a challenge, reported June, feedback from the graduates was VERY positive and included comments like:

- *"I knew PMI would take care of its students."*
- *"Great venue with a large PMI staff turnout."*
- *"We loved the family friendly environment. It was a great way to reconnect and enjoy my family at the same time."*

There was a lot of activity generated all around. Every graduate left feeling appreciated and proud to be a graduate of PMI.

# Establishing an Alumni Awards and Recognition Program

By Donald Ivanoff

Career schools can benefit from presenting awards to their graduates and alumni. Awards presented to alumni by the institution's alumni community show appreciation to its graduates. When properly leveraged, the school can gain substantial benefits from both the alumni who are receiving the awards and the greater community.

Alumni awards generally are divided into two categories: awards to *distinguished alumni* and awards to *dedicated alumni*. Distinguished alumni awards are given to those who have done well professionally, have been honored by other organizations, or demonstrated noteworthy deeds. Dedicated alumni awards are given to alumni who serve the school and its students in a variety of ways. While the awards can have different names, alumni awards typically fall into these two categories.

Some schools present awards for each program they offer, or they present some sort of "alumnus of the month" recognition. When planning an awards program it is important to

---

***It is important for the award selection process to be clear of internal political pressures. It is vital that the awards are perceived as both thoughtful and fair.***

---

ensure that there are enough *qualified* candidates. Otherwise the honor can be diluted by presenting too many and become meaningless. Each award should have a clear set of criteria. This makes it easier to define what you are looking for and to explain to the award recipients why they won. Things to consider when determining award



**DONALD IVANOFF** is a leadership, organizational development and fundraising consultant based in Brooklyn, N.Y. He was part of the alumni relations team at Career Education Corporation, where he worked with Sanford-Brown Institutes and Briarcliffe College

from 2009–2011. Prior to that he served as director of alumni relations at Brooklyn's Polytechnic University for eight years. He began his career as a student affairs administrator at several not-for-profit schools in the northeast.

**Contact Information:**

Donald Ivanoff  
E-mail: [divanoff@yahoo.com](mailto:divanoff@yahoo.com)

criteria are whether there are a minimum number of years since graduation that must have past, whether the graduate needs to be gainfully employed, whether self-nomination or anonymous nomination is allowed, and whether willingness to receive the award in person is a necessary component of the program. Schools will sometimes

---

***When done well, alumni awards programs can help you uncover some fantastic success stories, attract press to your school, and build pride within your graduates and throughout the campus.***

---

get nominations of people who attended the school but never officially graduated, yet might be worthy of an award. Your criteria need to be clear about how each situation is

handled. Another frequent concern is whether graduates who are employed by the school are eligible for an award. There are pros and cons.

The requirement for a set number of years is because it may take time for someone to distinguish him/herself. The issue of gainful employment is a sensitive issue at career schools. It is therefore wise to focus on honoring alumni who have used their training to a strong career path. However, there are exceptions, such as if an unemployed graduate raced into a burning building and saved a family. This might be an opportunity for a special award.

Less stringent requirements are often seen in the dedicated category of awards. Frequently, these are presented to alumni who have done exemplary work as volunteers in admissions, tutoring, helping to connect their employers to the school's career services office, or working as volunteers with student organizations and at school events. Dedicated awards can be a useful tool to honor alumni who have helped connect the school to government officials, community organizations,

or have worked for association political action groups.

Asking for nominations is an important part of the process and can be done in a number of cost-effective ways. These include posting a call for nominations on social networks, by e-mail, in your newsletters, or as an insert in other mailings. When beginning an awards program, the first nominees are often identified by school staff and faculty. Allowing self-nomination is valuable because you can uncover unknown contact information.

It is important for the award selection process to be clear of internal political pressures. It is vital that the awards are perceived as both thoughtful and fair. There will need to be someone who has the ultimate decision as to whether a nominee gets passed onto the decision-making group. If gainful employment or graduation status is required, be sure both are verified. Final award decision-making is often left to a committee that includes alumni, trusted faculty, and administrators. It is not unusual for the committee to be empowered to make recommendations to the school's leadership who will then have the final decision. In the event that there is a disagreement between the committee and the final decision-maker, it is best to have an open and frank discussion, so that volunteers are not alienated and question the validity of the decision. Once awardees have been determined, be sure to thank the original nominators and committee, and inform them of the details for the award presentation. Quite often, the awards committee serves anonymously or with only the chairperson announced.

The issue of when and how to present awards is complex with many appropriate choices. Some schools feel that incorporating awards into

---

pre-existing events is the most cost-effective option. Presenting a distinguished alumnus award at graduation can be impressive for the graduates and their family members, and allows the award to be presented in front of what is usually the largest crowd of the year. However, there are also equally valid arguments for building a dedicated alumni awards reception that becomes an opportunity for alumni to gather and celebrate the success of one of their own. Presenting an award to a graduate at their place of employment or at a community event can help a school bring awareness to itself in front of a new audience. This is particularly effective when a graduate has been elected to a community, professional, or technical association. Another option is to present awards as the centerpiece of a student-based program. Re-enforcing positive outcomes to students is an effective retention tool and opportunity for the students to meet a potential role model or mentor. Every effort should be made to present all awards in person. Some schools make it a requirement.

There are excellent photo opportunities for your Web site and the local

press in a well-produced awards ceremony. There are opportunities for press releases, local news coverage, and testimonials from both the awardees and their employers.

When thinking strategically about your awards program, an often-missed opportunity is extending invitations to classmates and employers to witness the honor to one of their own. Even if they don't attend the award presentation, this is a chance to remind them about the quality of the graduates your school produces. In addition, employers are usually happy when one of their employees is honored. The employer can be asked to assist with public relations initiatives.

When done well, alumni awards programs can help you uncover some fantastic success stories, attract press to your school, and build pride within your graduates and throughout the campus. There are incredible opportunities to highlight the positive outcomes of the education your career school provides, through showcasing your alumni.

# Essentials for Cultivating Alumni and the Enhancement of Reputation

By John J. Stachniak, DeVry University

**T**he alumni of your institution are your reputation.

There is no illustration of your institution's success that is clearer and more meaningful than highlighting the career progression and achievements of your graduates. Their outcomes are one of the most important influences on the reputation of your school. This is why it is essential that your alumni become informed and cultivated resources. They can be an invaluable source for affecting change.

## **It's a Marathon – Not a Race!**

For career-centered schools, starting a program for alumni can seem daunting. The initial process of launching an alumni community is compounded by

lack of basic logistical and support mechanisms. Benchmarks for goals, metrics, and essential steps are hard to establish. Even so, what is important is not to rush to the end result. It is more effective to progress through the strategies to ensure your alumni association is meaningful, sustainable, and possible. Continuity and a long-term commitment to alumni engagement is the only path to achieving results.

## **Identity – Engagement – Support**

If you were constructing a building, you would start with the foundation and add floor by floor. The same is true in alumni relations. You can't get to your goal without a strong foundation. If you build the top floor first it is



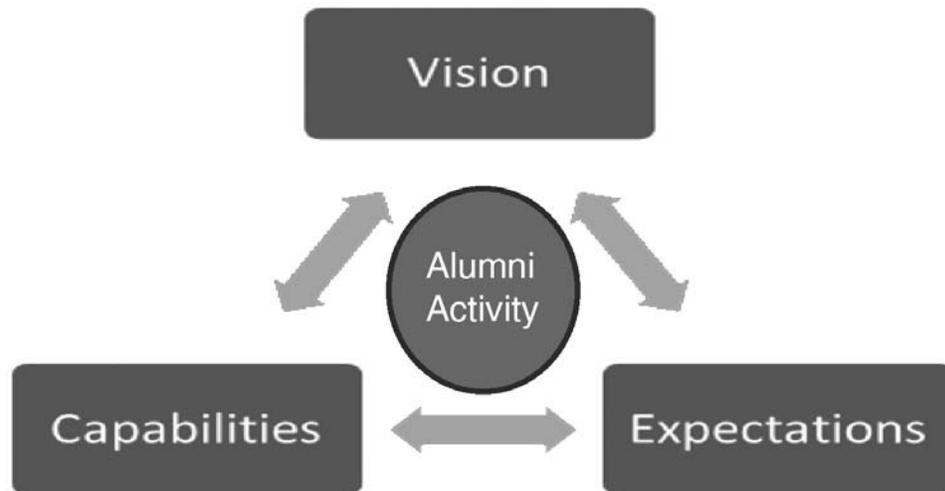
**JOHN J. STACHNIAK** is a senior alumni relations and advancement professional with more than 22 years of experience in non-profit and proprietary education. Currently the national director of alumni relations for DeVry University and the Keller Graduate School of Management, he has also

served at Benedictine University, Saint Xavier University, and as the senior director of alumni relations for the Career Education Corporation family of institutions. He has won a Gold Award for Alumni Programming from the Council for the

Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) where, as a longtime member, he has served as both a conference chair and faculty member. He has a B.A. degree from Loyola University of Chicago, and resides in both St. Charles, Ill. and McKinney, Tex.

## **Contact Information:**

John J. Stachniak  
Director of Alumni Relations  
DeVry University  
Highland Landmark V  
3005 Highland Parkway, 5th Floor  
Downers Grove, IL 60515-5683  
Phone: 630-515-5485  
Fax: 630-353-9911  
E-mail: [jstachniak@devry.edu](mailto:jstachniak@devry.edu)



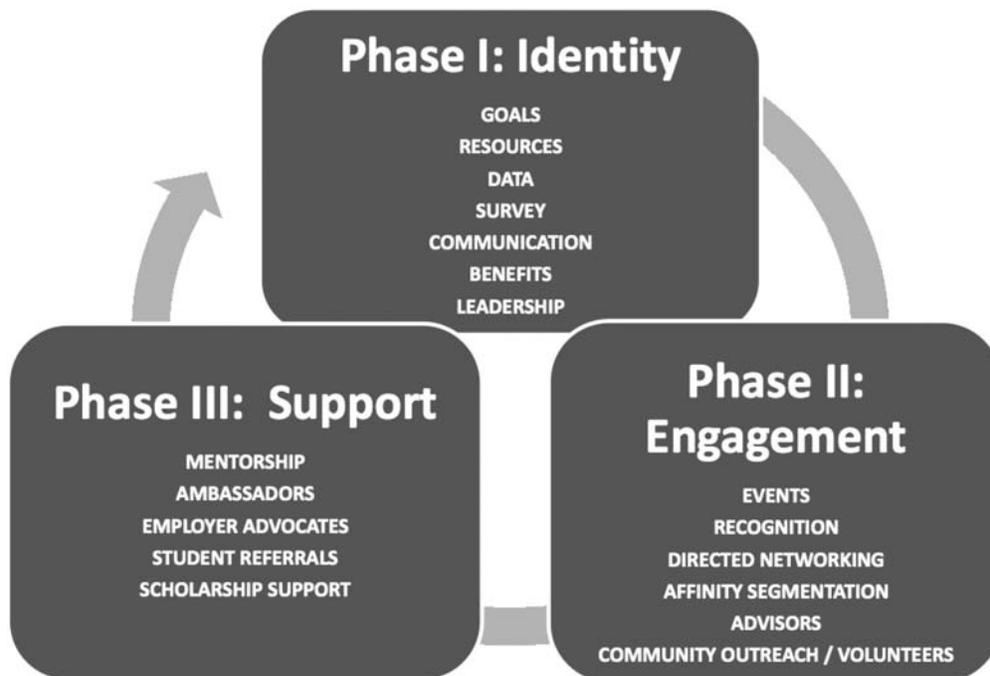
likely that the alignment of **Vision, Expectations, and Capabilities** are off and progression of **Identity – Engagement – Support** is missing.

The alignment of Vision, Expectations, and Capabilities is essential. What do the alumni want? What do we want the alumni to do? Whether it is to enhance school reputation, mentor current students, provide outreach to the community, or all of these, everyone has to agree. It's hard to build a ranch house when others may be expecting a skyscraper. The expectations have to be aligned with your resources such as staffing, budget, and data support. Each phase builds upon the other, with Identity making Engagement possible. Engagement leads to the willingness to Support, and Support leads to increased Identity.

#### **Phase One: Identity**

This is where the foundation is created for your alumni association. In this phase you create an alumni awareness (or “identity”) through communication. It starts with having a message and a way to convey it. Along with the foundation blocks, this creates the WIIFM for alumni (What's In It For Me). The key elements of this phase include:

- **Data:** Determine your alumni population size, how it is stored, and how accessible it is, while also engaging your data managers to begin a consistent method of data update and management. One of the first hurdles will be creating a process to transition records from “student” to “alumni” status in a consistent manner. Then, the process shifts to maintaining accurate records. I've seen the percentage of alumni “in communication” (good addresses and e-mail) increase from 38 percent to over 50 percent almost overnight by getting data managers working in partnership. Having a dedicated data resource person (or team) is essential. You live or die by your data and the ability to update it on an ongoing basis. The number one item alumni are looking for is access to their transcripts. If the budget is available, the implementation of an official alumni Web community (integrated to the database) can help maintain alumni records and provide a metric for “official membership.”
- **Alumni Survey:** A survey of alumni interests and engagement



is important in this phase. Understanding alumni expectations, needs, and preferences is essential. This also provides a benchmark for assessing alumni attitudes and affinity.

- **Benefits:** Establishing meaningful benefits for alumni that can be expanded as the program develops. This can include discounts on products, access to campus facilities and resources, access to career services support, continuing education, and meaningful networking both in-person or through social media.
- **Communication Cycle:** Establishing a consistent communication cycle that ensures the alumni are informed on a regular basis. Creating alumni “branded” social media channels is also important. This includes an alumni section on the school Web site, LinkedIn, and Facebook, while also issuing quarterly newsletters and monthly e-bulletins.

- **Alumni Leadership:** All too often, most new alumni programs forget a crucial element: alumni leadership. These individuals, best identified through recommendations, are the leaders for the alumni effort. They become the advisory board—the formal face and voice of the alumni. Establishing a clear definition of their advisory role and duties is important. Working with campus leaders, these individuals can identify opportunities for alumni volunteering.

**Important metrics and outcomes from this phase include:** Percentage of alumni records updated and “in contact”; Facebook and LinkedIn group memberships; newsletter “opens” and “clicks”; Web site visits; and more.

### **Phase Two: Engagement**

Once there is the basis for communication, some initial services, and a firm understanding of alumni needs, the activity goes to the next level—alumni engagement. This also

includes alumni interaction with students. Important elements include:

- **Student–Alumni Transition:** Students are alumni in training. In addition to adding an alumni presence around graduation (e.g., formal welcome into the association, an alumni guest speaker), this can include incorporating alumni leaders into the student lifecycle. This can begin at orientation, through academic panels, and allowing students to participate in alumni networking events.

---

***The ultimate goal of alumni programming is to provide alumni with the information, services, and benefits to become and remain engaged, and cultivate that engagement into meaningful advocacy and support.***

---

- **Affinity Segmentation and Networking Events:** Alumni are looking for meaningful opportunities to network. Networking by academic program, campus, and/or career field are good places to start. Alumni communication at this time can branch out from the global to specific affinity segments. The same is true with social media. These events and outreach need to be specific with a clear purpose addressed. Examples include events about a career topic, or offerings of valuable business connections and opportunities for recognition. Alumni can also be invited to volunteer in different roles.
- **Alumni Recognition:** As more information is obtained about alumni successes, implementing a formal recognition program is important. Identifying and recognizing distinguished alumni, alumni by program, and allowing alumni to recognize students, top

employer partners, and faculty members will enhance alumni interest and pride. These can occur annually or, in the case of multiple campuses, by each alumni group. Each campus should have a separate alumni chapter with national recognition for the recipients from among the campus chapter recipients/nominations.

- **Academic Advisors:** Alumni can be a valuable resource to individual academic programs. Their experiences can make a good program even better.
- **Community Outreach:** Each alumni association can engage in partnership with its local community and charities. For example, I've worked with the American Diabetes Association, where several of our national campus chapters adopted a walk location. Alumni from those areas were invited to participate, providing great visibility for the school and giving alumni the opportunity to "make a difference."

***Important metrics and outcomes from this phase include:*** Networking event participation and registrations; tracking the number of alumni "testimonials" obtained; tracking the number and participation in community outreach activities; and more.

### **Phase Three: Support**

When alumni are engaged, the opportunities for specific alumni support are more likely. Examples are:

- **Alumni Ambassadors and Mentors:** Survey results show that alumni want to support current students. Once alumni have been properly

identified and cultivated, there is the opportunity to formally mobilize them into a mentoring network. While this can be created in a social media format, each academic department or program can organize a formal mentoring group. Alumni can be a resource for new and prospective students, providing guidance and that first networking contact. Adult returning students especially benefit from the opportunity to network with someone who “has been there.” At the same time, alumni can be mobilized to serve as formal ambassadors for a campus, school, or program. Aside from the benefit of alumni available as living examples for the campus community, they also serve as powerful advocates with businesses and legislators. Mapping the extent of engaged alumni across the region or around the world can be a powerful reflection of alumni outreach and the extent to which the school is touching lives.

- **Alumni Legacy and Referral Program:** Cultivated and informed alumni are a tremendous resource for student referrals. Offering alumni useful channels to refer a candidate can provide a highly motivated group of students. Alumni do not seek any personal benefit in return. Alumni Legacy Scholarships can provide special recognition for graduates by providing tuition assistance if they continue their education. Alumni legacy families are a powerful testimony to the strength of an institution.
- **Employer Partnerships:** With updated alumni information and

alumni who are informed and engaged, exciting responses will develop from the employers of your graduates. Alumni segmentation can be expanded to include the mobilization of alumni by specific employers. Large organizations can establish alumni chapters by a given employer. These provide a unique opportunity to formally engage these large organizations. Aside from the recognition value of these partnerships, mobilizing these alumni can also lead to establishing special relationships. A crafted partnership can lead to additional student enrollments to satisfy specific academic and talent needs for that employer.

- **Scholarship Fund Support:** Many students, regardless of school-based scholarships and other support, need additional resources to achieve their goals. At the same time, alumni are very aware of the difficulties of attending school. As alumni become more informed and engaged, there is often a willingness to help students achieve their dreams and career goals. Many organizations establish a Scholarship Fund to provide scholarship support beyond those already offered. Established as a 501c3, these scholarships give alumni and outside organizations the opportunity to assist students directly. This type of effort is separate from the school organization. Stories of student recipients are a powerful example of how alumni support can change lives. These students, in turn, can become powerful alumni advocates.

*Important metrics from these activities include:* Tracking the number of alumni mentors and

ambassadors, the number of students engaged, and the student retention rates; tracking the number of alumni referrals and alumni legacy enrollments; participation rates in employer chapters and program enrollments; setting goals and tracking the amount of resources raised for student scholarships, the number of alumni participating in scholarship support, the student recipients and their retention rates; and creating a student repository of stories.

The ultimate goal of alumni programming is to provide alumni with the information, services, and benefits to

become and remain engaged, and cultivate that engagement into meaningful advocacy and support. When constructed properly, alumni receive the benefit of recognition and career/business connections and support. At the same time your institution becomes empowered with new ambassador resources to support students and enhance your reputation. In addition, your institution gains statistical information about graduates' career progression and gainful employment.

---

# Sustaining and Maintaining Alumni Connections with PlanetGRAD

By Dr. Rita Girondi, Training Masters, Inc.

**H**ave you been in orbit trying to organize and maintain an alumni community for your campus? It is essential to have the technology needed to maintain a world of connections within your institution....one that provides a dynamic network of communications and services to your students, graduates, and employers. In our world of networking mania, it is vital to use technology that builds channels of communities to support graduate success and campus goals.

One resource is **PlanetGRAD**, a school management system that connects alumni to the school, alumni to alumni, employers to the school, employers to alumni, and the school to all groups. Current students, both resident and online, also have access to the PlanetGRAD portal. This access

provides them with information, contacts, and inspiration to stay in school and enjoy the many benefits of being in your alumni network.

Most postsecondary career schools find it challenging to sustain alumni interest and contact after graduation. Alumni leave school ready to move into their careers. Once they obtain employment, they move into the next phase of life. Unlike colleges and universities, career schools don't have football teams and other alumni-connecting activities to maintain contact and promote campus loyalty. In addition, career schools do not fund-raise like colleges and universities do. The result is that the connection fades as the goal of employment is reached.

PlanetGRAD provides many reasons for the school alumni contact to remain



**DR. RITA GIRONDI** is the former owner of career schools in Pennsylvania and is currently the owner of Training Masters, Inc., a technology-focused company that offers numerous products, programs, and services to career schools, colleges, public schools and businesses. She has been involved in education for 40 years as a teacher, campus

president, and vice president of a national chain of career colleges. Dr. Girondi develops online courses and conducts seminars nationally on various topics, primarily focused on campus culture, educational improvement, leadership development, and student success.

**Contact Information:**

Dr. Rita A. Girondi, President

Training Masters, Inc.

Office: 717-901-6868

Cell: 717-571-8555

E-mail: [docrita@trainingmasters.com](mailto:docrita@trainingmasters.com)

Web Site: [trainingmasters.com](http://trainingmasters.com)

strong and grow even stronger with time. Ongoing communication offers many benefits for all groups involved in networking.

Here is what PlanetGRAD makes happen:

**Alumni can post their portfolios** that include resumes, reference letters, and

---

***To build a successful alumni community requires the technology to offer products and services to grads, and communicate with them on an ongoing basis.***

---

other employment support documents for all to see. They automatically receive e-mails when job openings are posted. This networking connection results in grads

helping grads with job openings. In addition, employer referrals provide a major link to all alumni seeking employment.

**Employers can easily post job openings** and review student portfolios. They can communicate with the school, arrange interviews, post job-filled announcements, and keep in touch with the status of upcoming grads as well as alumni seeking employment changes.

**Schools can offer enhanced career services** that can positively impact placement outcomes. Student contact information is updated regularly allowing the school to keep in touch with alumni individually and in groups.

PlanetGRAD delivers a weekly digest of student demographic changes and graduate job-seeking activity. The school can easily monitor their activity, support their needs, and acknowledge success. In addition, changes to students' information including addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are quickly available. Benefits such as contests and promotions built into PlanetGRAD will encourage alumni

to return frequently to keep their information up-to-date.

An advantage of this type of technology is that the school can customize it and provide services so graduates maintain a campus connection. For example, a school can create a Campus Career Mentor Program where working alumni can offer guidance and support to the graduates still seeking employment.

Schools that offer internship/externship experiences can easily communicate with the externs and the employers. As they monitor extern activity and obtain feedback from students and employers, the schools can quickly identify areas in need of attention and facilitate the record-keeping process.

Another significant benefit of a student management system with a focus on alumni is the ability to support the schools' default prevention efforts. Contact and communication are key to graduate employment and repayment of student loans.

**Current students can access PlanetGRAD** as they begin to build their portfolios and seek career-building skills. Keeping them focused on the job search can provide the motivation to stay in school when obstacles occur. The system promotes retention by encouraging students to build connections while taking their courses. It helps maintain their determination to graduate and become gainfully employed.

**Advisory boards remain consistently connected to the campus** with an effective school management system. Notifications and communications keep board members fully informed of campus activities, events, and areas of opportunity that members can support. Through a system like PlanetGRAD, a

---

strong network of exchange can add significant value to the experience for advisory board members, current students, alumni, and the school.

**Special features** can include graduate success stories, scholarship opportunities, regular announcements of campus activities, community service projects, and continual postings of photos, videos, etc., from events like open houses and graduation ceremonies. Management systems like PlanetGRAD provide the opportunity to seek graduation speakers, build campus pride, and welcome new employers to the area and maintain Facebook and Twitter communication. Schools can highlight recognition and appreciation rewards as they acknowledge people who have made significant contributions to the mission of the school and student success.

A special section offers career advice such as tips for getting and keeping a job. Career-focused articles can be

posted along with learning videos on interview skills and more.

**Vendors that work with career schools can offer discounts** for job-related supplies, tools, and resources that working alumni need. Student and graduate advantage discounts for various retail stores, services, restaurants, etc., can be provided. In addition, campus stores can sell products that promote school loyalty and student success. All this can be easily communicated to alumni, students, and others affiliated with your campus.

To build a successful alumni community requires the technology to offer products and services to grads, and communicate with them on an ongoing basis. Technology needs to address the specific needs of building and sustaining alumni communities on your campus, regardless of size.



# Bonuses of an Alumni Community, Plus Funding the Budget

By Michael Fischler, *Beyond Graduation*

Creating an alumni community at your career school brings many bonuses. Alumni can be very effective recruiters of qualified students. They can function as ambassadors to the local business community, bringing information and resources back to the institution. And they can be help with placement.

There is an expense attached to an alumni community. This includes office space, personnel, and more. However, the benefits of a strong alumni group will easily offset the cost to your school. While a new alumni community builds membership and works to show value, it may not be in the alumni community's best interest to charge for membership. Is there a way to quietly fundraise, while building the portfolio of benefits

.....



**MICHAEL FISCHLER** is the CEO of Beyond Graduation. For more information, email Michael and learn about how alliances with vendors can help to fund your alumni community.

**Contact Information:**  
Michael Fischler, CEO  
Beyond Graduation

E-mail: [mfischler@beyondgraduation.com](mailto:mfischler@beyondgraduation.com)  
Web Site: [www.BeyondGraduation.com](http://www.BeyondGraduation.com)

for your alumni? The answer is a resounding YES!

From insurance to credit cards and much more, there are many vendors who will help to support your alumni

---

***From insurance to credit cards and much more, there are many vendors who will help to support your alumni community.***

---

community. At the same time, your alumni group becomes available to these vendors for the promotion of potential services. Many vendors will happily assume the expense of marketing—direct mail, e-mails, etc.—and will develop promotional materials that talk about your institution's alumni program as well as the services offered.

You can often negotiate a price for these services. The transactions are seamless to your alumni; they only see the discount or special offer they get as a member. At the same time you see revenue to pay for alumni services.

Insurance and credit card offerings don't always have a wide appeal. Some offers don't easily have a tie to the

school mission. Fortunately, there are many other options.

Alumni clamor for items sporting their career school logo, which they love to wear. After proudly achieving their diploma or degree, they want to show off their school with logos on

---

***Alumni clamor for items sporting their career school logo, which they love to wear.***

---

items such as shirts, or the school crest on their license plate holder. Nothing is quite as sweet, post-degree, as a morning cup of coffee that is served up in a school logo mug.

If you have concerns about the start-up costs of an alumni community, the idea of opening a store stocked with customized items and paying for space, staff and inventory can be extremely daunting. Plus, there's the issue of space on campus. A store on or near campus (if you have space) is great for the current student body. But, how many of your alumni are on campus when they have discretionary cash to spend on sweatshirts? Many vendors therefore provide customized e-stores for alumni communities. These com-

panies will create a custom shop just for your alumni, along with a landing page that features your school, logos, clothing, and other useful items.

Usually sales of **any** items through the store will earn the alumni community a commission. That means that whether your alumni buy a World Series Champ pennant or a baby t-shirt featuring a very tiny school logo, these sales will support your organization.

Typically vendors provide the service, store, commission, and also marketing support. Ask your vendors if they will take on the initial marketing expense of telling your current students, recent grads and longtime alumni that there is a way for them to purchase clothing and other items to show their school spirit.

Some career schools with vendor partners quietly use the funds to support the efforts of the alumni community. Other schools encourage shopping through the site by letting alumni know that a percentage of sales will fund the alumni community.

# Overcoming the Challenges to Setting Up and Developing an Alumni Community

*By Dr. Susan F. Schulz, Susan F. Schulz & Associates*

Career schools large and small see the value of formalizing alumni programs. So why doesn't every career school have an alumni community?

Here are some reasons: School leaders often believe there is not enough time, staff, funds, or know-how to make it happen. Often school owners face more pressing priorities. School leaders believe they need a "recipe" book and go-to source to deal with challenges in setting up an alumni program. Other reasons for not setting up alumni communities include no one available on staff to head up the alumni initiative, limited funds to hire anyone, or no decision about who the alumni director reports to. There are endless reasons and other priorities and all valid.

Here are some common obstacles and easy-to-implement and proven solutions reported by career schools with successful alumni programs. They are listed as typical questions/comments and suggested solutions.

## **Funding Alumni Communities and Return on Investment (ROI)**

*How do we respond to our school*

*leadership when they ask about the return on investment (ROI)?*

Happy alumni refer students, re-enroll in programs, work in the classroom to impact retention, and can report job openings where they work. All that is \$\$ measurable.

*We have no funds to set up an alumni community. Does fundraising address the issue of funding an alumni association?*

Career schools are differentiating themselves from traditional alumni associations by NOT asking for money. Clearly, graduates have much more to offer their institutions such as enrollment referrals, assistance with retention in the classrooms, providing job openings at their place of work, and much more. So fundraising typically is not part of the alumni community concept for the career school sector. Let's face it. Fundraising is a turn off, and the focus of the career school alumni community is engagement and appreciation!

It's true that new initiatives require funding and a return on investment.

Alumni communities can be set up on a budget. Someone already on staff can be assigned the job of alumni director. Or hire someone from outside the school for 10 hours a week to start. There should be little cost for office space since schools already have a

---

**Alumni “community” seems to better differentiate a career school alumni organization from alumni groups that focus on fundraising. The concept is that your school is available to your grads long after they complete their studies.**

---

facility. And, ideally, your student information management system can be adapted to track alumni. Hopefully alumni pages can be easily added to your school Web site. If you track the increase in enrollment, retention, and placement as a result of your alumni community, you’ll have more leverage to ask for additional funding.

ment, retention, and placement as a result of your alumni community, you’ll have more leverage to ask for additional funding.

*We don’t have much of a budget. How can we market our alumni community?*

Graduate success stories are a great way to promote your alumni community. Imagine posters throughout your campus featuring your great grads, articles in your newsletters, and successful grads featured on your Web site. Success stories fall into a few categories: *Good Deeds*—grads who volunteer in the community and have been recognized by outside organizations; *Good Starts*—grads who started their own businesses or advanced quickly on the job; *Good Experience*—grads credit your school with having dramatically turned their lives around. How do you find these stories? Just keep in touch with your grads and ask them!

*We don’t have a budget to staff the alumni community department the way it should be. What can we do?*

Alumni volunteers are the best way to take pressure off your school staff. Borrowing from the big schools, simply elect or assign two to three “captains” from each graduation class. They can serve to connect with their classmates and perform other small tasks. Be careful not to overburden them. Make sure they each receive awards and recognition.

*Our school owner wants to know the Return on Investment (ROI) from an alumni community. How can I show this?*

Return on Investment is essential—and a challenge! It requires measuring everything that happens as a result of your alumni community. That’s why it is important to set up systems for qualitative and quantitative evaluation. Ask your IT staff how they can work with you to track graduates and maintain all contact information. Discuss the three key areas you want to measure: 1) Enrollment referrals; 2) Retention as a result of alumni involvement at the school; and 3) Placement—how many job openings do alumni provide you, plus updates on their employment status. If you use an outside student management provider, then encourage them to set up methods to maintain alumni records and track activity.

*Return on Investment is an important part of any new initiative. How can we demonstrate ROI from an alumni community from the start?*

It’s a challenge since results take time. If you are given a budget or request funds to operate your alumni community, then it is expected you’ll show \$\$\$ results. We suggest that you start by building ways to measure engagement. How many grads are

involved in your alumni community? How do they interact with current students and what percentage of these students stay in school? How many grads attend functions? How many alumni return as guest speakers? These are easy to measure from the start and show that the alumni community is making a difference before you can show the ROI in other ways.

*Why should a career school set up an alumni community?*

Formalizing innovative alumni communities is the next evolutionary and revolutionary step for the career school sector! It's just that simple. We can transform a concept from traditional colleges into a benefit for career schools. An alumni organization affirms that career schools are unique options for postsecondary education because we adapt to the needs of our students, and we continue to serve their needs long after graduation.

### **Prioritizing**

*We have other priorities and no time to set up an alumni community.*

Your priorities probably focus on enrollment of qualified students, retention, exceeding placement stats, and Gainful Employment. You can easily make that happen by structuring your alumni to send you referrals, assist with retention, and tell you about job openings where they work. Being in touch with grads means you can easily contact them to find out where they work and their income.

*What are some of the benefits of a career school alumni community?*

A great benefit, as well as challenge, is cleaning up your database of students

and grads. You need an up-to-date student and grad list to keep in contact for numerous reasons—many of which are required. Updating your list benefits your career services, placement, financial aid departments, and more.

### **Getting Started**

*What's the best way to start an alumni community?*

Graduation is typically the last contact point the school has with its students. So this is a perfect time to induct them into your school alumni community. This can be as easy as giving each grad a pin and alumni community membership certificate and card, and holding an induction ceremony during graduation—all with a lot of fanfare! Imagine how impressive this is. Just think about what it tells parents and friends about your school. It's a real testimonial.

*Should other school officials be involved in the setting up and development of our alumni community?*

Yes, the entire school needs to be involved (in an ideal world)! In the meantime, be sure everyone is aware and understands how an alumni community will benefit and help them reach the goals they are measured on.

*Just how important are alumni communities to career schools?*

There are hundreds of reasons for career schools to have active alumni communities. Alumni communities add credibility to career schools. As education “goes global,” students locally and from throughout the world expect that they will remain connected with their school long after graduation.

They want to know there is an active alumni community at the school they are considering, one that will continue to serve them and keep them in touch with students they meet.

*If career schools are redefining the look of alumni communities, shouldn't the name be changed to reflect this uniqueness?*

This is a great point and one reason why many career schools call their organization “alumni community.” The word “community” seems to better reflect the goals of staying connected.

*What's the difference between an alumni community and an alumni association?*

Alumni “community” seems to better differentiate a career school alumni organization from alumni groups that focus on fundraising. The concept is that your school is available to your grads long after they complete their studies.

*We are a small school. How can we set up an alumni community?*

The size of a career school does not matter at all when setting up an alumni community. The results should always be the same—increased enrollment retention, placement, and branding of your school.

*Our grads get entry-level jobs and have no way to make contributions to the alumni community.*

Career schools have the unique opportunity to set up alumni communities where fundraising is not involved. Instead, ask grads for student referrals, employment skills coaching, and job openings where they work.

## **Developing and Maintaining Alumni Relationships**

*How can we get grads to stay connected to our school? We lose contact with so many of them.*

The goal is to keep grads informed about all school development, offers, new programs, and what is available to them in their special status as alumni. With an alumni community you stay in touch and help grads continue to feel like “insiders” and part of your school. That makes it easier when you want to contact them about where they are working!

*A great many of our alumni have relocated out of town for employment. So how can we reach them?*

People do move around a lot and typically don't advise anyone of their new addresses or phone contact. This is a major problem for career schools that need to track graduate placement records. The solution to how to find them is, plan ahead. When your students graduate, be sure to get as much information as possible including how to reach them via Facebook and LinkedIn. Then, keep in touch often—not just 30, 60, or 90 days as required. While you are waiting to benefit from this planning-ahead strategy, you'll still have to contact old grads. The way to do it is simply one at a time.

*Our students aren't very social while in school. Why would they value socializing and networking as alumni?*

It's true that career school students often go to class and quickly leave to go to work, take care of children, and handle other responsibilities. But something happens to them when they are

in the workplace. They crave networking, especially with people they have something in common with—their former classmates.

*On Facebook should there be a separate profile for the school alumni community?*

There is no black and white solution. Some schools argue for separate alumni community profiles. Others say that one institution profile on Facebook gives alumni the chance to interact with prospective students and tell them about your school.

### **Alumni Events**

*One of the first steps we took when starting an alumni community was to run an event. It didn't work out. Why?*

Running an event requires a very strong infrastructure. That means your alumni community has to be set up and running. You need systems in place to contact grads, track responses, a Web site to support marketing, a director, and much more. Otherwise, it's like planning a project on quicksand.

### **What Should We Offer Alumni?**

*What benefits should alumni be offered?*

This is the easiest task. There are so many discounts available from your community. Just ask local vendors and national companies as well. This includes retail, travel, entertainment, groceries, and more. All discounts are offered just because your grads said YES to being alumni.

*Just how important are alumni membership cards?*

One goal is to make a membership card so important and valuable that

grads feel “naked” without one. This means creating membership benefits that are unique and sought after like discounts, access to special classes, workshops and activities, and invites to premier events. Next, decide whether you want each card to include the grad's photo!

*What other benefits would appeal to alumni?*

In time we realized that grads really value courses to help them stay up-to-date with technology in their field. Some want to repeat a course they didn't do well in while in school. Out-of-work grads need refresher skills on how to get a job, advance on the job, or get a raise. Alumni appreciate scholarships, too.

### **Staffing the Alumni Department**

*What should be done when the school can't hire a full-time alumni director?*

Ideally, your school will see the benefits of a full-time director. Your alumni director can work in community outreach, arrange for externships, and bring your placement department new job openings. Some schools are successful with part-time directors.

*Should we set up an alumni community with a president and officers typical of traditional schools?*

The consensus is probably not. An effective way to structure an alumni community could be simply asking for volunteers on a project-by-project basis. It keeps the enthusiasm up with limited obligation. And if someone leaves, the program is still intact.