Future Trends in Alumni Relations
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While my intent is to talk with all of you about “Future Trends in Alumni Relations” I thought it would be helpful to begin by providing some background about alumni relations and the history of our associations, particularly since a number of you work in areas other than alumni.

In the United States, alumni associations are almost as old as our alma maters. Arizona State University was chartered as an institution in the Arizona Territory in 1885. Only nine years later, a group of alumni organized and chartered the alumni association. Their primary mission was to lobby the Territorial Legislature to raise admission standards and improve the academic stature of the school. The impetus for their organization was the territorial commitment to build “the grandest building in the Territory”, the Main Building, on the fledgling campus. Today, that building, Old Main, is our alumni center.

At the start, our associations were entirely voluntary, supported solely by individual alumni. Volunteers maintained mailing lists, collected dues to support activities, produced publications, organized events and annual meetings. Alumni were the institution’s first fundraisers. Development has its roots in alumni relations. Not only are the origins of the annual fund with our alumni, but also our capital campaigns. Again, at ASU, the first Capital Campaign was organized and administered totally by alumni for the specific purpose of building a gathering place for students, the institution’s first Student Union.

The first alumni association was established at Williams College in 1821. The early associations assumed many of the roles handled previously by individual volunteers. Alumni directors (for many years called alumni secretaries) became important officers of the university, serving and working closely with institutional leaders and trustees. Even then, the first alumni secretary (Wilfred B. Shaw was named alumni secretary at the University of Michigan in 1897) was paid by alumni dues rather than by his alma mater. When our schools needed more extensive fundraising, alumni officers directed these efforts. Development officers and separate departments resulted from a need for institutions to reach out to a constituency broader than alumni in order to acquire additional support. This was a watershed event for alumni associations. Programs and events traditionally sponsored by alumni offices were spun off to development offices. The overall result was a decline in the relative importance of the alumni office to the institution. Matters that were once the exclusive purview of the alumni staff and its volunteer leadership became shared responsibilities – often with communications, development, or special event offices. This continues.

Today, a number of framing issues important to our discussion about the future of alumni relations exists. The first of these issues is governance.
**Governance**

There are three models of alumni governance. Those models are independent, interdependent, and dependent. It must be noted that these are about alumni governance. Institutional governance is vested in another group, the Board of Trustees, Board of Regents, the Corporation – whatever name associated with the legal body with the fiduciary responsibility for the institution. Their authority is delegated to the campus CEO and further throughout the institution. Therefore, even alumni associations who declare themselves as independent still must have a relationship to the governance of the institution. We exist because of our alma mater. We do not create our alumni – they are a product of our institutions.

That said, there are a limited number of alumni associations in the United States that declare themselves as independent. Rather than independence, the real issue is one of self-governance. Independent alumni associations have a structure in which the association CEO reports to the volunteer board of directors rather than an institutional officer. They receive no (or very minimal) funding from the institution or its foundation. The board determines direction of the association and approves the association’s budget.

Interdependent associations receive part of their funding from their institution, but the majority of their funding is self-generated – through dues, affinity programs, and other areas such as travel and merchandise sales. The association CEO reports both to the association volunteer board and to an institutional officer.

Dependent associations are essentially university departments. They receive all or almost all of their funding from their institution and report exclusively to an institutional officer. They may have a volunteer board of directors, but the board is advisory rather than policy-making. Most often, the department is named alumni relations and is part of a larger development office.

- It is my belief that the trend is away from independence of the association. Campus or institutional CEOs recognize that alumni are a vital constituency who provide a credible voice and contribute time, talent AND treasure and are unwilling to accept an arms length relationship with alumni. The alumni body of an institution may give less than one million dollars or more than 100 million dollars a year to its alma mater. Are trustees or regents willing to accept an arms length relationship with these alumni? As 1, 2, or 3 billion dollar mega-campaigns become the norm the stakes are simply too high for campuses to lose control of and access to their most significant donor pool. This is true for both private and public institutions. I believe that as alumni associations develop internationally, they will move toward the model of interdependence.

**Funding**

As mentioned in our discussions of governance, funding of alumni associations comes from a number of different sources. Associations are funded from their institutions, their foundations, membership dues, or from revenue generated by association sponsored programs. For independent or interdependent associations institutional funding is most often provided for maintenance and support of alumni records and/or for alumni communication such as magazines or on-line communication tools.
Institutions, both private and public, are being forced to take a hard look at their budgets and what they can and cannot fund. Private institutions, with a stronger history of support for alumni activities, are still investing in alumni programs as they are looking for continual and long-term financial support from alumni. Public institutions, faced with difficult budget situations, are asking alumni associations to find additional revenue so that they can utilize institutional resources to serve current students.

- In the United States, the trend is for greater institutional support for alumni programs and services in private institutions while public institutions are being charged to generate more of their own revenue.

**Professionalism of Alumni Relations**

There have always been outstanding professionals in alumni association work. Alumni association professionals must have a skill set that is broad and deep. They must be visionaries who also understand the importance of attention to detail. Yet, alumni relations has never been recognized as a profession. I contend that part of the reason for this is that alumni relations lives exclusively within the world of academe, as opposed to our colleagues in development (fundraising) who have counterparts in thousands of other non-profits such as health care. In addition, we have no professional certification or academic programs focusing on our work. The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), our professional association focusing on alumni, development, and communications within academe, has entered the discussion regarding the professionalism of alumni relations. However, there remains no certification, nor academic programs to teach people how to be the best at what we do.

Until the past decade, most alumni directors were alumni of their own institutions. In 1982, when Laney Funderburk was hired at Duke, the job posting stated, “Only alumni need apply.” This statement, even in an implied sense, isn’t true anymore. More institutions are selecting alumni relations professionals to lead their associations. Associations are functioning more with a corporate or business structure and approach to management.

In some ways, we are adopting methods used by development and our fundraising counterparts. Development and fundraising professionalism is more defined and documented. A professional association (in addition to CASE) exists for all of fundraising (AFP, the Association of Fundraising Professionals).

- The trend must be for us to talk and act EVERY DAY like alumni relations is a profession. We must demonstrate to the campus that we are professionals both by how we act and how we look. We must create career paths so that the best of our young professionals see alumni relations as more than a singular job. We must advocate for demonstrations of professionalism in things such as certification and academic programs.
- We must continue to support research regarding the impact of alumni on the institution in order to demonstrate their value.
**Boards and Volunteers**

Boards can be either policy-making or advisory. Generally, independent and interdependent associations have boards that are policy-making. They determine mission, vision, goals, and objectives for the association. In addition, they have some fiduciary responsibility for the association – if not for their overall budget but at least for the portion of the budget that the association generates. Dependent associations have boards that are advisory in nature – they do not set direction nor make determinations of budget.

Board members fall under two general categories, although there is occasional overlap. Board members are either “influencers” (able to exert power or prestige) or “representatives”. Influencers have contacts or relationships that can assist the institution in advancing its goals. Those contacts and relationships may be financial and/or political – they can bring both affluence and influence. Representatives are those members who have a history of involvement with the association or its affiliated groups and are elected to the alumni board in recognition of their loyalty and service.

- The trend is to establish a board balanced with influencers and representatives. Institutions need alumni who have contacts and connections that can help advance the institution; they also need individuals who represent the many constituencies that make up the alumni body.

Alumni associations generally are able to find wonderful volunteers. The issue becomes how best to utilize them, depending on where they are in their lives. Alumni Associations are recognizing alumni have different interests depending on where they are in their life cycles. Alumni in their 30s may still be in the “growth-building” stage of their lives with their careers still ascending and with children still in the home. As a result, they may not have a great deal of time to devote to alma mater. Alumni at a more “stable” period of their lives may be able to set aside significant time to serve.

- The trend is to engage alumni in activities that fit best with where they are in their life cycles. Alumni associations need to create job descriptions for each volunteer and each volunteer activity so that our alumni are informed and comfortable with what we are asking them to do. Alumni associations need to identify a staff member to be responsible for managing the program that recruits, retains and recognizes volunteers.

**Institutional Involvement: Campus Relationships**

If we are to be truly effective, we must develop strong partnerships throughout the campus. Partnering with campus departments can provide wonderful ways to connect alumni with their alma mater.

One of the most important and logical connections for alumni is with academic affairs. After all, the greatest impact the institution has had on the alumnus/a is his/her academic experience while a student. The alumni association can partner with the institution’s continuing education department to connect alumni to credit programs, certification and training programs, or programs that simply respond to intellectual interest or curiosity. This connection is particularly important for international alumni, from both on and offshore programs. Alumni associations have also been successful in partnering with faculty to participate in chapter events, reunions and even on-line discussions or chats.
Alumni associations should ensure faculty are involved with their alumni board and serve on alumni committees. Alumni associations should find opportunities to recognize and reward faculty members for outstanding teaching, research and service. Alumni should serve on faculty boards and committees, and be part of important search committees.

Many institutions now have staff members in academic colleges, schools or departments whose primary responsibility is to work with alumni yet whose employment is through the academic unit and/or development. It is incumbent that the alumni association ensures staff in the colleges and academic units understand the importance of the units and the associations working in tandem to advance the goals of the institution. While this model can also be applied to offshore programs, the vast majority of offshore programs do not have onsite employees to work with alumni.

Historically, alumni and development (fundraising) have had a strong, dynamic relationship. Sometimes, however, this relationship has been strained due to an attitude of alumni as “friendraisers” and development officers as “fundraisers.” In contrast, I often refer to the “Five I’s” – a continuum of alumni engagement – Identify, Inform, Interest, Involve, Invest. Alumni and development officers are both part of this continuum. We are simply at different stages. I declare that I am, in fact, a development officer – as are each of my staff members. I also expect that every development officer believe that he or she is an alumni relations professional. If everyone accepts this premise, then both the institution and its alumni will be well served.

Development or fundraising offices generally have two separate revenue streams – annual giving and major gifts. Alumni associations should have a role in each of these programs. Annual giving programs are heavily dependent on alumni and thus an already established relationship between the alumnus and the alma mater will make the annual fund “ask” much easier. And, when an institution begins a capital campaign and is looking for major gift prospects, those alumni who have been regular givers through the annual fund will be a targeted group for additional, larger one-time gifts.

The division of student affairs or student services provides incredible opportunities for the alumni association. One of the more important areas for alumni engagement is admissions. Alumni love to talk with prospective students, to be able to share their own experiences as a student to those who are considering becoming students – they demonstrate the institutional “output” in which prospective students and their parents have a great deal of interest. Alumni can also provide admissions offices with an objective evaluation of a prospective student’s interpersonal skills and assess how he/she will fit with the campus culture.

Alumni are also very interested in becoming involved with the other end of the continuum, career services – the institutional output. Alumni of many ages are interested in activities related to careers from networking to simply learning about what alumni have done in their careers. Career programs originally were believed to serve young alumni hoping to build their careers, but alumni associations have found that mid career alumni are interested in thinking about second (or third) careers and our mature alumni simply like to talk with others and share stories about their own careers. In addition, many alumni in positions of responsibility would prefer to hire graduates from their alma mater, so they
are looking for ways to identify candidates for positions. New efforts by alumni associations to develop on-line services have expanded career services opportunities exponentially. On-line, students and alumni can talk with others in their field, identify employment opportunities, apply and even be offered positions - all as a result of on-line activities.

Career programs are also great ways for alumni to interact with current students and young alumni. More experienced alumni share their knowledge and experiences in career panels or may commit to longer-term relationships by serving as mentors. Arizona State University has been successful in designing on campus programs for current students to talk with alumni in different careers as well as in offering career panels off campus.

Another very important student services area has gained in importance among alumni associations. That is working with current students. It is essential for us to help students identify as alumni prior to their graduation. Arizona State University has created a “Five Year Plan for Student Engagement” that begins with the student’s senior year in high school and continues until graduation. Our five-year plan identifies opportunities each year to help students identify with the alumni association. It is my contention that the stronger and more positive the student experience, the more likely the student will be an engaged alumnus.

A final partnership of greater interest to public institutions than private institutions is government relations. However, we are seeing increased activity in alumni association involvement in advocating issues or legislation that may affect their institutions – whether the institution is public or private. Educational institutions have become very effective in developing grassroots advocacy efforts to inform elected officials about institutional issues – the difference between public and private is the need for public institutional focus on the annual or biennial budget.

- Alumni associations are recognizing that campus partnerships strengthen their efforts and facilitate their missions. The trend is to work more closely with each and every area within the institution. Partnerships can increase both efficiency and effectiveness. Joint programs can serve current students and alumni while advancing the institution through recruiting better students, assisting graduates in employment, advocating for an increased budget from the legislature and increasing student and alumni affinity resulting in contributions of time, talent, and treasure.

Now that a number of the “framing issues” confronting alumni relations have been discussed, I am going to focus on several more operational issues with which we deal on a daily basis.

**Financing Alumni Programs**
Alumni dues are a mainstay of many alumni association budgets. Dues fall into two categories: annual and life.

Annual dues establish a habit of giving. One theory is to “catch” the alumnus/a within the first five years of graduation, make them annual dues-payers, and then convert them to life. Life members can then be solicited for additional giving. A number of institutions
have developed special annual giving clubs for life members of the association. A couple of examples would be the Jay Hawk Society at the University of Kansas and the Old Main Society at Arizona State University.

Another theory is to put a big push on graduating students to become life members and then not worry about dealing with annual reminders. Life membership dues, when put into an endowment, can provide financial stability for the association. The temptation to spend these dollars immediately is oftentimes too strong for the association to resist – resulting in the need to service an alumnus for his/her lifetime without the dollars to do so.

With either annual or life, alumni who pay dues identify a constituency that has made a conscious decision to belong and support their alma mater. Identifying dues payers helps us segment those most loyal!

Another debate exists on many campuses with regard to how dues programs may interact with the annual fund. While some (particularly development officers) may contend that alumni dues negatively impact alumni giving, research has shown that alumni dues payers are more consistent givers and that a dues program is more likely to enhance rather than harm an annual giving program. An annual fund caution: I have recently heard discussion from the ASU annual fund regarding their interest in providing “membership” and benefits to contributors. This is a proposal that will increase alumni confusion between the two offices and the Internal Revenue Service.

- We will depend on our alumni dues and annual giving more than ever.

Many associations, particularly in public institutions, are faced with shrinking institutional support. As a result, they are being forced to generate more revenue to replace the lost of state/institutional support. While most associations first turn to efforts to increase dues payers, many of us are finding increasing dues payers does not produce enough revenue to produce needed alumni programs.

Over the past decade, two areas have increased in importance to our associations: affinity partners and sponsors. Affinity partners are companies with which an alumni association has a contractual agreement and who provide compensation to the association based on participation in the company’s program or programs.

While affinity partners can provide associations with significant and much needed revenue, we need to balance our commercial contacts with our alumni against our programmatic contacts. In addition, it is imperative that an association considers broadly the whys and wherefores of their partnerships. Associations need to establish criteria in advance to objectively evaluate prospective partners.

Sponsors are partners who use marketing dollars to increase their visibility and exposure to our alumni. Alumni involvement is more indirect. The sponsorship dollars they provide to the association support programs and events directly. The major question facing alumni associations is whether or not the increased funding is worth the “commercialization” of programs or events.
Serving Alumni

Communication
Clearly, one of the most important goals recognized throughout alumni relations is communication – considering both input and output. No one at our institutions communicates more than we do and, with the electronic capabilities we are all discovering, opportunities for effective communication with our alumni are increasing. However, a recent benchmarking survey, administered by e-mail, in which 13 public and private universities participated, found that increasing communication was one of the areas where alumni felt their alumni associations could most improve.

Electronic
If we are able to develop an electronic “relationship” with our alumni, we can increase and improve the information we have on each alumnus and provide them with communication and services targeted to their individual wants and/or needs. In addition, the alumni association benefits in a number of ways. Of great importance is that having alumni communicate with the association electronically can save staff time. Alumni who update their own records, or who register for events or pay dues on-line allow staff to spend their time in more direct service to alumni, rather than on handling paper or simply receiving information over the telephone. We can also expect that our database will be richer, more robust AND more accurate.

The alumni association is also able to deliver information electronically much more efficiently and effectively. With increasing concern about budgets, sending information electronically eliminates postage and printing costs – all rising almost daily. The other great advantage to electronic communication is time of delivery. Since most everything done in alumni relations is time-sensitive, electronic communication provides us an opportunity to notify and/or remind alumni of events without worrying about how long it may take our event reminder to find our alumnus’ home mailbox. For international alumni, this is a very exciting development. We are able to keep alumni “attached” in ways not possible even a few years ago.

The down side of electronic communication is with the use of blast emails for alumni. “Spam” has become horrific and alumni associations must take every precaution that their communication with alumni is of value and not viewed as an intrusion. Our research shows that all alumni prefer email communication, and while this is particularly true for Generations X and Y, NO ONE wants spam in their mailbox. What this says to us is that we must develop policies for use of email that are both well thought out and thoughtful of our alumni.

Print
Many alumni officers have begun to question whether the time has come for us to abandon print communications to our alumni. The benchmarking survey mentioned previously found that more than 60% of alumni say they read their alumni magazines frequently. In addition, the study found out that alumni perceive that they are INVOLVED with their alma maters if they read their magazines, but this is not yet true for email
communication. And, as research both with this benchmarking survey and in other studies shows, alumni involvement is positively related to giving.

**Face-to-face**

Any discussion of serving alumni through our communication efforts must include face-to-face communication. After all, we are about relationships – finding ways to attach our alumni to their alma maters. And, research has shown that alumni have emotional attachments to their alma maters based on relationships established while students. Another factor influences the need for alumni relations to continue to focus on face-to-face communication. That factor is the increasing proportion of our alumni who are female, and that research has shown females have a greater interest in “high touch” and respond at a higher rate to personal “asks” or invitations.

More and more, alumni associations are recognizing that they must learn more about the desires of their alumni. Budget and staff constraints demand it. If they are to best serve alumni, associations need to know what alumni want, and how alumni want information delivered from their associations. Therefore, alumni associations must commit to research and to surveying their alumni regularly.

• Electronic communications will continue to increase. Alumni will communicate electronically more frequently and more extensively, and alumni associations will do the same. Electronic communications will provide alumni with more and better information and thus, service, from their associations. Electronic communications will provide alumni associations with more and better information, and will allow them to operate more efficiently.

• Gen X and Gen Y will expect to do business electronically, including paying for events, dues and donations.

• Print will become an enhancement to electronic communications, but will not disappear, at least for another generation.

• Face-to-face communication will always have a place with alumni relations. Alumni associations must continue to find ways to connect alumni with their alma maters in personal ways that remind them of their college experiences.

• Research must become a line in our annual budget so that we can communicate more effectively and efficiently.

**Programs**

**Program Delivery**

Alumni associations have different models of program delivery. They are: working through clubs and/or chapters led by volunteers; using key alumni in an area to assist in organizing programs and events; and utilizing staff exclusively to organize and administer events. The most effective method is largely situational. The key is alumni involvement, whatever the vehicle. It is important to remember that for many alumni, particularly Gen X and Gen Y, involvement leads to giving.

While some schools may have an alumni base to support a chapter in a certain geographic area, others may not. Not having a critical mass of alumni to establish or maintain a formal chapter doesn't mean an association cannot produce effective programming. Lack
of a formal chapter shouldn’t prohibit the use of key alumni for local buy-in to an event or program. What IS important is to determine whether or not alumni numbers are large enough to find officers and chapter leadership, with a “succession management” strategy in place. The single most common factor in a chapter’s inability to sustain itself is in the inability to recruit and groom future leadership. Alumni associations are recognizing the importance of leadership training for volunteers, including the challenge for club and chapter officers to prepare successors. Alumni associations are focusing on volunteer management as never before.

- The key to success in program delivery will be flexibility.
- Alumni associations will continue to find that the more involved alumni are, the more likely they are to give back.
- Alumni associations will move away from staff driven chapter events, and depend more on key volunteers who focus on specific events.
- Chapters and clubs will continue to be refined so that organized groups exist only in areas where there is an indication that they are able to sustain themselves beyond their current officers.
- Attention to volunteers will increase with regard to recruitment, retention and recognition.

Off Campus Programs
Alumni associations are looking more at how to reach the maximum number of alumni in the most efficient manner possible. In regions outside the area in which the institution is located, alumni are joining together to produce cooperative events. The most advanced of these programs in the United States is in Washington D.C. where a number of alumni groups have formed the Capital Alumni Network (CAN). CAN puts on a number of programs, and even hosts sport leagues with teams from each university’s alumni chapter. Other cities sponsor events involving alumni from the universities who are members of a particular athletic conference, as an example. For chapters and clubs either in or outside of the institution’s location, different groups from within the institution are banding together to produce joint events. An example would be the College of Fine Arts and the College of Architecture and Environmental Design teaming up to create an event around a traveling furniture design show. Athletic events such as football or basketball games are now being seen as “anchor” events for broader-based programs. A football game in another city may bring alumni together, and an institution may be able to create a career panel during the football weekend.

In general, alumni chapters are very interested in raising money for student scholarships and so many of their programs are designed toward that end. Such events range from golf tournaments to wine tasting.

Many schools also take advantage of faculty travel by scheduling alumni events when faculty may be visiting other areas. A number of schools are also using faculty on-line, hosting discussions around particular topics.

On-campus Programs
Events on-campus are becoming more and more comprehensive and collaborative. At many institutions, homecoming views the actual football game as again, the anchor for
the Homecoming experience, rather than the total experience. Colleges and academic units are creating programs during a Homecoming week or weekend. Programs include colleges inducting prominent alumni into their Halls of Fame or producing educational seminars highlighting popular faculty. Homecoming may also include joint student-alumni events such as “Career Connections.” Whatever the event, it is important to get students involved in the on-campus alumni programming as a strong correlation exists between student involvement and alumni involvement.

Reunions vary dramatically among geographic locations and student/alumni demographics. In the United States, class year reunions work best at private institutions. Larger public institutions are attempting to develop reunions that focus on affinities alumni may have had as students – student leaders, scholarship winners, academic disciplines, athletic teams.

Alumni associations are conducting alumni focused academic seminars that range from a few hours to several days. These longer programs, Alumni Colleges, can provide wonderful opportunities for significant interaction among faculty, alumni, and students.

- Alumni events will continue to be cooperative among institutions, and among individual units WITHIN institutions.
- Alumni associations will continue to focus on prospective and current student programs, recognizing that alumni are committed to helping others as they themselves were helped. Students will be a part of most alumni activities.
- Programming will continue to look more closely at alumni demographics, recognizing that alumni are becoming more diverse and more female. Research in United States’ institutions tells us that alumni who are other than Caucasian believe that traditions, values and “what I learned about life” during their college experiences are very important to them and will want alumni programming to reflect those college experiences. Females will continue to be more interested in personal communication and face-to-face interaction. These groups will remain particularly interested in providing student scholarships and in mentoring students.
- Gen X and Gen Y alumni will demand events that are low cost and combine fun with nostalgic components. They want events that enhance their feelings that they are important to their alma maters.
- Alumni associations must continue to listen to what is important to their alumni, focusing on the future involvement by Gen X and Gen Y.
- Alumni associations will continue to increase their knowledge of alumni needs, recognizing that increasing competition for alumni time and support demands better programming.
- Alumni associations must find ways to involve alumni, as we know that involvement of time with one’s alma mater is the greatest predictor of alumni loyalty.

**Staffing the Association**

**Developing the Future Leadership of the Profession**

More and more, discussions are being held about identifying alumni relations as a profession and establishing a career path for our young professionals. Ours is a complex
and demanding profession – as I tell everyone I interview for a job with our association – “alumni relations is not a job, but a lifestyle.”

A number of factors must be considered during discussions about an alumni relations career. The alumni relations professionals of the future will be Gen X and Gen Y who believe they can do everything, but don’t necessarily choose that path. The generation whose members believed they “owed their soul to the company store” is long gone. The contemporary groups are looking for flexibility in work schedules, access to campus events and services, and the ability to see a career path. If they don’t find what they want, they leave.

Another factor is, along with our increasingly female alumni base; we have an increasingly female alumni staff. Our female staff members are young, hardworking, and committed. Often, they are also spouses and mothers. In a profession with demands far outside a normal work life, alumni staff must find some balance between careers and personal lives. Alumni directors are finding they need to look differently at work schedules to accommodate exceptional staff members attempting to balance complex lives. Alumni directors are also looking for different skill sets when they hire new staff. Multi-taskers who can move quickly from one task or project to another – going back and forth between responsibilities are worth their weight in gold.

If we are to truly look at alumni relations as a profession, we must also take graduate education seriously. We live in the world of education and thus must accept the values of the academy. Alumni directors must find ways to support efforts of employees who attempt to earn graduate degrees.

Hiring the right people is certainly a key in developing future leadership in alumni relations. First, alumni relations staff need to understand the lifestyle commitment demanded in alumni positions. One arena in which to find outstanding staff members is the campus itself. We need to keep our eyes and ears open to find outstanding staff members in other campus offices who already understand the campus culture and are “proven commodities.”

Another arena for future employees is our own volunteers – that makes it incumbent upon ourselves to know who they are and what are their specific skill sets. Volunteers can meet specific needs with high level requirements for our associations – staff with legal, tax, marketing, sales and event planning experience.

The final staffing issue to discuss is for alumni directors to determine criteria for promotability. Future alumni leaders must have the ability to manage detail without losing sight of the institutional and alumni missions. My experience has been that our future leaders identify themselves by demonstrating several characteristics: a “can do” attitude, a willingness to volunteer to help others, an understanding of the concept of completed staff work, an ability to write well and a high “likeability” quotient. I always ascribed to the philosophy that when a promotion opportunity became available there would be no question that I was the obvious candidate, based on both competence and attitude. The other key factor to remember in “our business” is that we are in the relationship business.
and so need to have staff who LIKE PEOPLE!!! I have found that personnel issues are rarely about competency; they are about interpersonal failings.

- Alumni professionals will be increasingly female.
- Our organizations will need to become more flexible to respond to Gen X and Gen Y who are strong staff members, but want a balance between work and family.
- We will increase our recruitment of staff who understand the culture of academia and the demands of alumni relations.
- Those who are “promotable” must be helped to see a career path and be encouraged to commit to alumni relations for the long-term.

Volunteer vs. Staff Roles
An issue of increasing importance to alumni associations is whether associations are volunteer led or volunteer driven. Volunteer led associations depend on their volunteers to assist in the daily work needed for alumni programs. Volunteer driven associations get their direction from the volunteers, but empower the staff to implement programs and deliver services. Reduced staff and budgets are demanding that associations depend more on volunteers. A caution is that alumni professionals remember they are the ones judged on a program’s failures – regardless of how much work volunteers may do. In addition, we give up a great deal with regard to what the program may look like when we relinquish control to volunteers. On the other side, we must provide volunteers with meaningful responsibilities. The model of retired alumni coming in to stuff envelopes every week simply doesn’t exist any longer. Strong volunteer recruitment and training is the key.

- We will increase our dependence on volunteers but must find appropriate ways for them to be involved. Alumni professionals cannot abandon their responsibility for programs and services, but will need to find meaningful ways for volunteers to be involved.
- Strong recruitment and retention of volunteers will increase in importance. We must provide meaningful opportunities for our alumni if we want them to be involved and invested in our institutions.

Alumni relations is the best area on campus in which to work. We are able to live in the wonderful world of academia, working with students every day but also have an opportunity to meet and learn from outstanding alumni in every walk of life. While alumni relations requires a commitment of “lifestyle” it also produces a rich and fulfilling career.

To conclude: alumni constitute a university’s largest and most permanent constituency. They are the guardians of the heritage of the institution and will remain long after the current faculty, administration and even buildings are gone. The alumni association holds primary responsibility for building relationships with alumni – relationships that are necessary to the long-term health and success of the university.

Alumni association responsibilities include:
1) **Identifying** and tracking of alumni.
2) **Informing** alumni regularly about the alma mater and keeping them “attached” to her.

3) **Developing or increasing interest** in the alma mater both through communications and programming.

4) **Involving** alumni in the life of the university, whenever and wherever possible.

5) **Providing** meaningful **opportunities** for alumni to give back – **to invest** in future alumni or in the future of the institution.