STUDENT AFFAIRS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Custom Research Brief

Research Associate
Toni R. Brink

Research Manager
Joe LeMaster

© 2012 The Advisory Board Company

Education Advisory Board
2445 M Street NW • Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: 202-266-6400 • Facsimile: 202-266-5700 • www.educationadvisoryboard.com

Table of Contents

I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge *Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:*

Alumni Tracking:

- How do universities track alumni satisfaction with their education, future educational plans, career development, participation on campus as alumni, and donations to the university?
- Are additional alumni metrics tracked by other institutions?
- How do offices across campus collaborate in information collection and storage?

Surveying and Information Management:

- What types of software do other universities employ for information collection and management?
- How do administrators ensure accurate information tracking?
- How often are alumni surveys administered to glean this information?
- How do administrators maintain valid information after university emails deactivate?
- How often are alumni surveyed, and what are the average response rates?
- Do administrators gather information beyond 12 months after graduation?
- What methods are most effective for obtaining information?

Leveraging Information:

- Do universities leverage alumni information to recruit new students or assist current students? If so, how?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
  - Education Advisory Board (2008). *Tracking Alumni: Strategies for Collecting and Updating Personal and Professional Information.*
  - Education Advisory Board (2012). *Tracking Student and Alumni Data: Leveraging Social Media, Historical Data, and Alumni Relationships to Build Robust Databases.*
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (http://nces.ed.gov/)

© 2012 The Advisory Board Company

Education Advisory Board
2445 M Street NW • Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: 202-266-6400 • Facsimile: 202-266-5700 • www.educationadvisoryboard.com

Research Parameters

The Council interviewed alumni services and career services administrators at public universities.

Universities Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Type	Approximate Enrollment (Total)	Classification
University A	Mid-Atlantic Distant Town	Public	10,000	Masters Colleges and Universities (Larger Programs)
University B	Midwest Rural Fringe	Public	7,000	Masters Colleges and Universities (Larger Programs
University C	South Large Suburb	Public	24,000	Masters Colleges and Universities (Larger Programs
University D	Mountain West Remote Town	Public	14,000	Research Universities (Very High Research Activity)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Administrators employ a variety of methods for the collection of alumni data. These methods include a combination of mail and email correspondence, surveys, telephone outreach, in-person data collection (e.g., collection of business cards), and alumni data collection software.

Software for alumni data collection can save staff time and resources and ensures accurate and timely information. Data collection software, such as The Raiser's Edge, automatically updates and cleans alumni data sets every 90 days. Social media monitoring software, such as Radian6 and Meltwater Buzz, not only collects alumni information from the web, but also manages the university's online presence in social media groups and analyzes both positive and negative online content about the university.

Contacts advise storing alumni information in one, university-wide database to ensure accurate data and to reduce duplicate correspondences. Some universities are combining separate databases into a single database, managed by one administrator but accessible to many offices. Contacts advise that the move to a single database is not simple, as staff fear a loss of autonomy in data organization and use.

Most administrators collect alumni data on an ongoing basis; however, some are actively reforming their alumni survey techniques beyond 12 months after graduation. Contacts observe that young alumni often need longer than six months to a year to settle into a new career; in response, administrators are developing new, comprehensive surveys that will reach alumni up to three years after graduation. These surveys focus on alumni attitudes towards the university and alumni career development. They will be administered through survey links included in emails and social media messages.

Contacts are not concerned about their ability to contact alumni once student university emails deactivate. To maintain valid information from alumni once university emails deactivate, contacts collect a secondary, personal email address for all post-graduation contact when students enroll at the institution. Other institutions do not deactivate student email addresses, although contacts admit that most alumni do not continue to use their university emails after graduation. Alumni are therefore encouraged to have university mail automatically forwarded to a personal address.

III. Alumni Information Tracking

Alumni Metrics and Data Collection Methods

Metrics for Alumni Data Collection Vary by Office

Contacts agree that individual offices prioritize alumni data collection differently, and they shape their metrics accordingly. Offices that collect alumni data include the alumni services office, career services office, university foundation office, and college faculty and staff. Administrators at **University C** suggest development of a central database to avoid duplication of work across offices and to prevent excessive outreach to alumni. Administrators track the following alumni metrics:

- **Current contact information**: mailing address, email address, and telephone number.
- **Employment information**: current employment status, position, and employer contact information.
- **Student data**: degree, year of graduation, future educational plans, satisfaction with educational and campus experiences, and whether or not a student is employed within his or her field of study.
- **Alumni participation**: participation as donors, as attendees of alumni events, or as campus volunteers as well as potential willingness to participate.
- **Student activities**: participation in international programs, athletics, and student organizations.
- **Social media profiles**: publically available information gleaned from social media as well as URLs for alumni social media accounts. [1]

Methods for Obtaining Alumni Data

Electronic Surveys
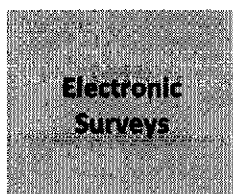
Surveys are increasingly popular for alumni data collection, and contacts administer them in different forums to reach a broad alumni population. Most commonly, administrators attach a link to the survey in outreach emails or through messages sent through social media websites, such as Facebook or LinkedIn.

Emails and Mailings
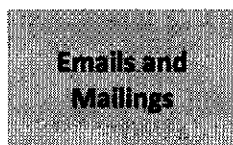
Administrators include a request to update personal and professional contact information in mailings and emails to alumni, such as invitations to events or solicitations for donations.

Telephone Outreach

University A staff telephone alumni to update personal and contact information only if email and mailing attempts remain unanswered. It is also common to update alumni contact information while conducting a capital campaign. [1]

---

[1] Education Advisory Board (2012). Tracking Student and Alumni Data: Leveraging Social Media, Historical Data, and Alumni Relationships to Build Robust Databases.

Alumni Magazine and Newsletters

Administrators at **University C** send alumni bi-weekly online newsletters, which include a form that invites alumni to update contact and biographical information. Administrators note that alumni are also motivated to update their information when they read the "Class Notes" section, which shares congratulatory information such as promotions, marriages, or retirement with the broader alumni base.

Alumni Association Chapters and Events

Administrators at **University C** organize alumni networking events on campus and at businesses that employ significant numbers of alumni. There they collect business cards and use the information to update the alumni database.

Social Networking Websites and Applications

With increased popularity of LinkedIn as a professional networking website as well as Facebook and Twitter, contacts suggest verifying alumni information based on information found through these websites. Administrators at **University B** recognize these robust sources of current information and are considering hiring interns to mine these websites for data. **University D** administrators will soon hire a company to manage alumni data collection via social networking sites, as well as the university's presence on these sites.

Alumni-Locating Software

Administrators at **University D** use AlumniFinder software to locate alumni information provided to credit reporting agencies. The software provides information such as previous and current addresses and telephone numbers, and it also allows administrators to view alumni credit reports. Contacts recommend this option only when other attempts fail, as it costs the university 50 cents per alumni inquiry.

Faculty Members

Administrators at **University A** and **University C** agree that faculty members can be valuable partners in updating alumni information as many faculty members maintain contact with alumni. They therefore sometimes appeal to faculty members to provide contact information for alumni.

Incentivizing Alumni Response at *University A*

Soon-to-be alumni receive an exit survey from the career services and alumni affairs offices while attending a mandatory pre-graduation event, sponsored by the registrar's office and alumni affairs. At this event, students collect graduation tassels, gowns, and tickets, and they register their contact information with alumni affairs and career services through a survey. Once students complete their survey, they gain entry to a raffle. This event alone provides administrators with updated contact information for 90 percent of graduates.

---

[1] Education Advisory Board (2008). Tracking Alumni: Strategies for Collecting and Updating Personal and Professional Information.

Education Advisory Board
2445 M Street NW • Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: 202-266-6400 • Facsimile: 202-266-5700 • www.educationadvisoryboard.com

© 2012 The Advisory Board Company

Frequency of Information Collection

Administrators Collect Alumni Information on a Rolling Basis

Administrators at **University A** and **University B** deliver the alumni exit survey prior to graduation. One benefit of this approach is the relatively high response rate, particularly when students are surveyed in person. However, many students prior to graduation are still seeking employment or determining whether or not to continue their education, and therefore information regarding these soon-to-be alumni is incomplete. To amend this information, contacts at **University C** and University A collect alumni information on an ongoing basis.

> Career Services Administrators at **University A** contact alumni through email, social networking, and via telephone every two to three months until the alumni updates career or graduate school information.

Administrators Describe a Need for Improving Long-Term Data Collection

Administrators at **University B** and **University D** are actively modifying methods for alumni tracking beyond 12 months after graduation, including the development of new surveys to administer between three and five years after graduation. Contacts agree that a standard exit survey for graduating seniors is insufficient to obtain relevant data. At University B, students complete exit surveys up to four months before graduation, and at University D, students complete surveys three months after graduation. In both situations, contacts agree that under the current system students receive surveys too soon to provide administrators with accurate information regarding student career placement.

Cross-Campus Collaboration

Collaborative Relationships across Campus are Essential to Efficient Information Gathering

With only three staff members in the alumni office, administrators at **University C** rely on positive relationships and cross-campus collaboration for data collection. The alumni affairs office partners with the development office for database management assistance, as the director of operations in the development office is the database administrator. Alumni affairs staff also partner with career services to connect job-seeking alumni with resources that meet their need and with the continuing and online education office to provide alumni with discounts for the office's services.

IV. Information Management

Use of Software in Information Collection and Management

Software Tools Aid Database Management and Information Collection

There is a wide selection of software which streamlines the information collection and management process. For database management, University C uses Raiser's Edge software from Blackbaud. This software updates data every 90 days, and administrators believe it is essential for accurate databases. Eventually, the entire university will use only this database, which will help ensure that everyone accesses the same accurate data.

Databases and Online Directories

- The Raiser's Edge (Blackbaud)
- NetCommunity (Blackbaud)
- Banner Advancement (Ellucian)
- iModules (formerly iAC)
- inCircle Pro

For survey collection, most institutions rely on the institutional research office to design and program a survey to send out to alumni; however, **University D's** career services office staff program their own surveys using SurveyMonkey. They also use social media monitoring tools to harvest online alumni data and to gauge sentiment regarding the university. There are two types of social media monitoring tools: social media profile management tools and in-depth social media monitoring tools.
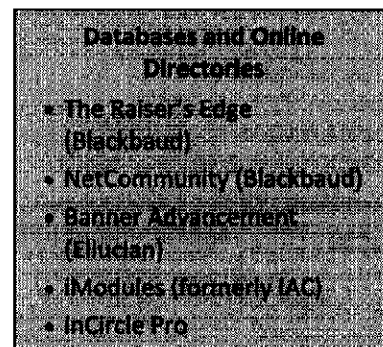
Social Media Profile Management Tools

- Manages multiple university-sponsored or university-related social media groups
- Monitors who follows or re-tweets university website
- Recommends profiles to follow
- Performs keyword searches
- Hosts RSS feeds
- Compares online presence to the presence of other institutions
- Examples include Sprout Social and HootSuite

In-Depth Social Media Monitoring Tools

- Manages multiple university-sponsored or university-related social media groups
- Monitors who visits website, re-tweets posts, and whether a visit results in an action
- Performs keyword searches
- Hosts RSS feeds
- Compares online presence to the presence of other institutions
- Utilizes dashboard analytics to gauge positive and negative web content
- Builds in-depth social media profiles on students and alumni
- Examples include Radian6 and Meltwater Buzz [1]

V. Leveraging Alumni Information

Alumni Mentor Programs

Contacts Recruit Alumni for Mentor Programs

At **University D** and **University B**, career services administrators hope to develop an alumni mentor program, through which interested alumni might meet with students who are considering the same career path. In addition to the role as a mentor, administrators hope that alumni might conduct mock interviews to prepare current students for their eventual job searches. Contacts at University D also note the importance of training alumni on how to conduct these interviews as well as on the expectations of a mentor, and they intend to make this training available to alumni online to accommodate busy schedules.

Continuing and Online Education Marketing

Alumni Receive a Discount for Continuing and Online Education Courses

In order to further engage alumni in university life, continuing and online education administrators at **University C** offer alumni discounted tuition rates. The discount amount varies by program, and this partnership requires timely information sharing and collaboration between alumni services, who indentify interested alumni, and the continuing and online education department.

---

[1] Education Advisory Board (2012). Tracking Student and Alumni Data: Leveraging Social Media, Historical Data, and Alumni Relationships to Build Robust Databases.