Introduction

The student members of the University Outreach Committee extend their gratitude for being given this opportunity to present input on Wesleyan’s alumni resources for students. We are eager to see this conversation move forward and to have the WSA become more involved in alumni-student issues in the future.

The Process

In February, the University Outreach Committee was formed and met to discuss important questions to help guide a discussion on empowering current students with alumni resources. Over the course of the semester, we conducted an electronic survey that was sent to the entire student body, researched current practices related to alumni resources, and met with members of University Relations and the Career Center to help us draft our set of recommendations.

Discussion

Guiding Questions

Three guiding questions led the group’s work:

1) In what job sectors and for which campus groups (e.g. departments, groups, teams) should there be greater alumni engagement? What areas are underrepresented? What should that engagement entail?
2) What existing events and infrastructure can we re-envision as opportunities to draw alumni?
3) How can we facilitate alumni-student interaction off-campus, such as in major alumni-student hub cities? How can we facilitate virtual alumni-student interaction?
Survey

The University Outreach Committee conducted an electronic survey of the undergraduate student body. There were 75 respondents. Here are some of our findings:

- 54% of respondents have not used Wesleyan online alumni networks
- 43% of students were not familiar with Wesleyan online alumni networks
- 73% of students who know about Wesleyan alumni networks use them
- 83% of students would be interested in using WesConnect as a current student

The major take away is that there is high student interest in Wesleyan alumni networks and there should be greater communication to students about the online alumni networks that already exist.

1. In what job sectors and for which campus groups (e.g. departments, groups, teams) should there be greater alumni engagement? What areas are underrepresented? What should that engagement entail?

While University Relations (UR) and the Career Center (CC) offer great resources, there is significant room for improvement in accommodating students in different job sectors, majors, and with different events.

Job Sectors and Majors

There was significant interest in opportunities related to the hard sciences: in health care/medicine, biomedical/biotech, science research, neuroscience, and environmental science. In addition, many students wished Wesleyan offered more finance or business opportunities, including in banking, management consulting and start-ups, as well as more opportunities involving technology. Greater opportunities in areas with a social responsibility, civic engagement, advocacy, or public service focus ranked high among students. Other job areas with high student demand include clinical psychology, marketing/public relations/advertising, legal, computer science, writing, arts/museums, government/NGOS, and film and television. Students felt that jobs related to the academic disciplines of the sciences, psychology, the arts, international relations, and economics were in particular need of more opportunities, but that may have more to do with the respondent pool than with actual demand.

There was also a desire for greater geographical diversity and more paid internships.

Events

Students proposed many ideas for events they would attend with alumni. Some included themed conferences or panels, academic department specific events, social justice related events, job shadowing, athletic events, games (e.g. student-alumni dodgeball), networking sessions, conference calls, seminars/trainings, one-on-one or small group meetings, social events, and community projects. For off campus events, students suggested creative ideas such as dinner parties/mixers, gallery openings, arts or sports events, community projects, tours of alumni companies, and book clubs.
2. What existing events and infrastructure can we re-envision as opportunities to draw alumni?

Any event can be re-envisioned as an opportunity to draw alumni. The key to doing so, though, is **advanced planning** by the organizers of the event and increased communication between student group leaders and staff members of UR and the CC. Any large event that is planned far enough in advance for UR or the CC to be able to contact relevant alums can be seen as an opportunity to draw alumni back to campus. This can include anything from concerts to plays to poetry slams to athletic events or protests. At present, these events often draw small groups of alumni back to campus, even if they are not on UR’s or the CC’s radar. Alumni are interested in attending on-campus events and in reengaging with their former student groups or other campus affinities, and currently there are many missed opportunities to invite them back and connect them with current students.

*Alumni Back to School Day*

Among current UR programs, “Alumni Back 2 School”, in which alums are paired with current students to shadow them for a day of class is a good start. The fact remains that having only one (or even two) such event on one specific day over the course of the year makes attendance prohibitive for many alumni, especially those who live outside the area.

A solution is to expand this program by obtaining a list of willing students in each major who would be willing to have an alum shadow them at any point in the year. This would allow alumni at the most convenient time of the year to get re-connected with campus and in touch with what is going on at Wesleyan more easily. It would also allow current students to forge personal connections with alumni in their field of study, creating unique networking opportunities for current students. The current structure of “Alumni Back 2 School” day with the full schedule of events including the brunch would be difficult to replicate with great frequency. As an alternative, the alum who participates and agrees to partake in some networking or other community event while on campus could receive a voucher to go to lunch with the student they are shadowing.

To summarize, increasing communication between the Career Center and student group leaders as well as increasing the availability of information about the resources that the Career Center possesses are key to facilitating such interactions and bringing alumni back to campus. Second, the infrastructure available for having alumni shadow students should be expanded.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase cooperation between UR/CC and Student group leaders
  - UR and the CC should work with WSA committees COCo (Community Outreach Committee) and the SBC (Student Budget Committee) to discuss upcoming student group events
  - UR and CC representatives should present at the beginning of year meeting for student group leaders, outlining the resources and opportunities available for student groups interested in involving alumni
o UR and the CC should frequently check the WSA calendar (http://wsa.wesleyan.edu/groups/calendar/ and Wesleying to learn of upcoming student group events)

- Expand the program where alumni can shadow current students to allow for shadowing on any day in which classes are in session
  o Create a list of interested students within different majors
  o Work to provide something along the lines of a free lunch if the alum agrees to participate in some event for the benefit of the major

3. How can we facilitate alumni-student interaction off-campus, such as in major alumni-student hub cities? How can we facilitate virtual alumni-student interaction?

Wesleyan must work to promote a feeling of community that is not limited to its physical campus. Current and past students must feel tied to each other through further opportunities for shared experience and interaction.

It is difficult for many alumni to attend events on campus, so University Relations has taken the right step by putting on events for alumni in hub cities. While current students may attend some of these events, the student body has not been adequately informed of that fact. University Relations should send an annual e-mail to students that they should check the online regional event listings and feel free to participate in events when interested. This is particularly relevant when classes are not in session. While some hubs contain a significant number of alumni, at least some seats at these events should be reserved for students. Many students find it unfair that many seats are reserved for alumni at on-campus events such as the Spring 2012 Justice Scalia lecture. If alumni are given this much priority at on-campus events, current students should feel more welcome at events in New York and Boston during the school year. Reserving seats for current students at these events will lead to increased connections between current students and alumni, thereby benefitting both parties.

Virtual Interaction

Virtual interaction is critical to transcending physical constraints and to building a cohesive Wesleyan community feeling. In developing WesConnect, the University has made a worthwhile investment. That being said, WesConnect membership should be expanded to include all current students. New students should be granted membership upon matriculation and the service should be introduced and encouraged during orientation. They should feel that they are entering a larger, multi-generational Wesleyan community, composed of more than just the students with whom they will share the physical space with for four years. These accounts should be created automatically for new students, similar to e-mail accounts. Incoming students should be encouraged to use the service to connect with community members who they meet during Summer Send Offs and informal pre-college meet ups.

Steps should be taken to integrate the various facets of the virtual Wesleyan community. Groups from social networks such as LinkedIn should be better integrated with groups on WesConnect. At minimum, such groups should link to each other where equivalent groups exist. University Relations should encourage and facilitate the formation of groups by alumni, with online
presence. It might also prove beneficial to have some online groups based on student groups. Especially student groups with a longer history or a larger base might use their WesConnect group to bring back alumni to campus, to allow their alumni to participate from afar, or simply to connect.

WesCAN and the WesConnect Directory should become integrated as well. Any WesCAN features missing in the WesConnect Directory should be added to it, and then WesCAN as an independent entity should be eliminated. If there are concerns about unwanted contacting about jobs and internships, an opt-in can be created for alumni to indicate a desire or the lack thereof to offer themselves as job or internship resources.

Benefits to facilitating off-campus or virtual interaction can include mentorship. An alum may be able to assist a current student with academic, internship, or career advice, or simply connect the student with others in the industry. Such a program could help relieve the Career Center’s workload while concurrently cultivating community spirit.

Recommendations:

- Invite students more overtly to off-campus event – annual e-mail
- Reserve seats for current students at off-campus events
- Wesconnect
  - All Current students should be given accounts and they should be created automatically, like e-mail accounts
  - Incoming students should be given accounts upon matriculation
  - There should be a Wesconnect Orientation session
  - WesConnect should be better integrated with LinkedIn. Links should direct to and from the pages for each group.
  - Encourage and facilitate the creation of groups by alumni, with online presence.
  - WesCAN and the WesConnect directory should become integrated. Any WesCAN features that are missing in the WesConnect Directory should be added to it, and then WesCAN should be eliminated.
- Parents of incoming students should somehow be integrated into this model
- Finding mentors for students can relieve the Career Center’s workload