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Reaching Out: Alumni Outreach for the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions

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Regis University
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Reaching Out:

Alumni Outreach for the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions

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Abstract

The Regis University Alumni and Parent Relations Department reaches out to generations of former students, and with University growth the challenge of this continually increases. Ways the Department can enhance support to graduates of the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions (RHSHP) were explored through varied media. The action research included interviews, an alumni survey, consultation with sister Jesuit schools, and review of secondary literature specific to the topic of alumni associations and organizational change. Results suggest that the Alumni and Parent Relations Department must openly communicate with the leadership of RHSHP in order to succeed in supporting the unique needs of the graduates, offering industry specific outreach, collaborating in the distribution of communication materials, and drawing from the expertise of multiple perspectives.

Reaching Out: Alumni Outreach for the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions

Alumni associations exist at colleges and universities across the nation. They maintain a sense of community long after school days end, create new opportunities for graduate participation, and generate a sense of support, both financially and personally from those whose feet no longer regularly tread across campus. At Regis University, the Alumni and Parent Relations Department reaches out to generations of former students. As the University grows, the challenge of this task continually increases, and consideration for how the Department can improve the service and support it offers the alumni of the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions (RHSHP), along with the University's other two schools, sits at the crux of the staff's mission. Exploring opportunities to improve service involves investigation of the history and present day operations of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, RHSHP, insight from alumni, faculty and staff, and information from other Jesuit universities in order to maintain the sense of community born out of the Regis University educational experience.

Background of the Organization

Regis University, a Jesuit-Catholic academic institution, offers higher education to men and women in northwest Denver, Colorado, at six Colorado Front Range satellite campuses, a Las Vegas, Nevada campus, and online. The mission of Jesuit education began in 1540 when Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, a group of men committed to meeting the "needs of its age" that would "transform leaders who would carry forth into their personal and professional lives a mission of service to others," as documented in the Regis University Bulletin (Regis University, 2004). Not only does such a Jesuit ideal manifest itself within the community of students, staff and faculty at Regis University, it lives on in the commitment of alumni.

At its inception in 1877, Regis University was known as Las Vegas College. In 1884 Sacred Heart College opened in Morrison, Colorado. The Regis University Bulletin records that in 1887 Las Vegas College and Sacred Heart College merged and moved to the present main campus location at 50th and Lowell Boulevard in Denver, Colorado (Regis University, 2004). The seventh largest of twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, Regis consists of three schools: Regis College, the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions, and the School for Professional Studies.

The Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions (RHSHP) began as part of a health care training program at Loretto Heights College. In 1988, Regis acquired Loretto Heights College and moved nursing education to the Lowell Campus. Enrollment flourished once the school became a part of Regis College and continues to experience similar success.

According to the Regis University Bulletin, RHSHP offers undergraduate, graduate and doctoral education in the health professions, including the only doctoral program at Regis University: Physical Therapy (Regis University, 2004). In 1991, following the development of the doctoral program, the Health Care Programs became the School for Health Professions, coinciding with Regis College's evolution into Regis University (Regis University, 2004). Then, in 2003, as a result of a 5.7 million dollar donation, the School became the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions, in honor of the donor, Margaret Rueckert-Hartman, a 1967 Loretto Heights College graduate. The school takes pride in its community involvement, offering such initiatives as the Channel 9 Health Fair, FunWalks, charity fundraisers, health education to inner city schools, and an annual nursing program trip to Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming (Regis University, 2004).

RHSHP is comprised of four departments including: The Department of Nursing, the Department of Physical Therapy, the Department of Health Services Administration and Management, and the Department of Health Care Ethics (Regis University, 2004). The Department of Nursing offers both undergraduate and graduate education opportunities. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) serves both current nursing professionals and those with no nursing experience wishing to work and advance in the profession.

The Department of Physical Therapy provides a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree (DPT), considered a “professional-entry doctoral program,” as well as an undergraduate minor option in Kinesiology in conjunction with Regis College (Regis University, 2004, p. 178). The DPT is geared toward individuals wishing to enter the Physical Therapy field. In addition to this option, the Department offers the post-professional doctoral program (tDPT) that permits current physical therapist professionals to complete education in an effort to advance professionally (p. 178).

The Department of Health Services Administration and Management (HSAM) is comprised of undergraduate programs in Health Care Administration and Health Information Management, a certificate program (post-baccalaureate) in Health Information Management and graduate education in Health Services Administration and Clinical Leadership for Physician Assistants (Regis University, 2004). The Bachelor of Science in Health Care Administration (HCA) began at Regis University in the fall of 1994 and offers students varied sites for classes. The Bachelor of Science and Certificate in Health Information Management (HIM) began in the fall of 1980 and changed its name from Health Records Information Management to the present name in order to echo the continued development and expansion of this field in the health profession (Regis University, 2004). The Master of Science in Clinical Leadership for

Physicians Assistants received approval in 2002 and has been offering training since that spring. This program was devised for “bachelor’s prepared physician assistants” who are licensed and practicing in their field or completing their last year of study at the bachelor’s level (p. 176). Finally, the Master of Science in Health Services Administration (HAS) builds upon previous learning and experience either through undergraduate training in the area or significant work experience, and has been offered at Regis University since October of 1999.

Each of the programs provides students with a variety of formats for completing training, from online to classroom based, to traditional and accelerated settings, and alumni reside in the state of Colorado as well as across the nation. In this light, it is important to consider how to best serve and support not only the diversity of specializations, but also the varied locations of alumni.

The Jesuit mission and provision of value-centered education coincides well with the aspirations of those associated with the medical industry. The Regis University Bulletin (2004) contains the RHSHP mission in conjunction with these ideals, educating “men and women as leaders committed to excellence within the health care professions,” uniting itself with the foundation of the greater Regis University community while focusing on the uniqueness of its specialization (Regis University, p. 178). This participation and support of the community draws people and positive attention to RHSHP and to Regis University as a whole, exemplifying the living mission of service to others in the local community (Brockway, 2003, p. 299).

Competitive Environment

According to Dill (2003) the marketplace for higher education continues to grow more and more competitive, influencing the way in which schools target new recruits. “Colleges and

universities thereby compete for students, research support, faculty members and financial contributions and this competition is becoming both increasingly aggressive and global” (p. 2).

Although an investigation of how alumni services can shape the University’s future is beyond the scope of the project, it is important to note how successful alumni outreach can extend beyond the alumni population itself. Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997) comment “apostles are those who not only are satisfied but regularly tell others about a product or service, becoming an extension of the sales forces” (p. 86). Not only are alumni customers to be cultivated for financial support, they also assist recruitment, whether informally by word of mouth or formally by participating in information sessions and education fairs. The level at which alumni participate as donors can also have an impact on the University’s financial status, and leverage the rate at which Regis can continue to accommodate growing class sizes and advance technologically through the funding of facility enhancements.

For example, part of “The Campaign for Regis University, Writing the Next Chapter,” (Regis University, n.d.a.) the University’s \$75 million dollar campaign, is to build financial aid and support facility improvement especially in the area of science. “The demand for science education is significantly higher at Regis than 37 years ago when the Science Building was completed. In addition to serving these students, the science faculty also supports the growing number of nursing and physical therapy students and the entire student body's core curriculum requirements in science” (Regis University, n.d.a). Alumni participation in this campaign significantly influences its success, and this is just one example of the way in which reaching out to alumni can enhance Regis’ ability to recruit and retain students.

While alumni outreach efforts have many other goals, it is logical to assume that involved and satisfied alumni are likely to be willing to both provide financial support to the university

and to serve as informal “recruiters” of new students by expressing their satisfaction with both their education and current involvement with Regis. Thus, The state of alumni outreach affects more than just the rate at which graduates participate in events. Their external support of their alma mater has bearing on the larger University’s ability to compete locally and nationally on a variety of different levels.

History of the Problem

Since RHSHP exists as one of three schools at Regis University, attention to each school by University Relations must be divided among them. The Alumni and Parent Relations Department, a subsidiary of University Relations, holds responsibility for serving alumni of all three schools, in addition to the alumni of Loretto Heights College. As per the Alumni and Parent Relations webpage on the University website, the mission of the Department is to “promote alumni and parent involvement in the advancement of the University, while providing significant opportunities for social, intellectual, and spiritual enrichments” (Regis University, n.d.c). The Department offers educational programs and career opportunities for alumni locally and across the United States in an effort to maintain Regis University’s Jesuit mission of life long learning. The researcher has been employed by Regis for a little over 2 years in a variety of capacities, first as a recruiter and more recently in communications, and is, thus, familiar with both the organization, its mission, and its various divisions.

With the recent rise in opportunity for employment in the health care industry, RHSHP has experienced a boom in enrollment. With this in mind, Alumni and Parent Relations must not only enhance current outreach efforts to graduates of RHSHP, but also consider how to meet the needs of the growing numbers of future alumni coming in the next several years. RHSHP serves a more specialized demographic than Regis College and the School for Professional Studies

(SPS). Therefore, knowledge of their diverse needs and desires must be considered in light of current events and developments within the health care industry.

A recent \$5.7 million donation specifically for RHSHP has allowed for the renovation and updating of RHSHP educational facilities, including major expansion of Carroll Hall, the school's headquarters. This magnificent contribution to the enhancing of RHSHP signifies a commitment to the growing need for quality education in the health field in recognition of the industry's shortage of health care professionals and rapidly advancing technologies. This financial contribution provided for state-of-the-art facilities giving students access to the most up-to-date opportunities for increased learning, and a growing awareness of the School's presence as a part of the wider Regis University system. With this success and growth, however, come some inevitable challenges for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department.

In addition to continuous annual growth of RHSHP students and alumni, another challenge for Alumni and Parent Relations revolves around creating enough opportunity for participation and variety of activities. Currently, there exists a minimal offering of such events specific to this group of alumni. The Alumni and Parent Relations Department recognizes this as a need for enhancement in order to expand the participation of RHSHP graduates. Possible factors influencing this problem may include limited possession of the following: time, staff, knowledge of the diverse alumni needs and desires, and untapped internal resources.

Importance of the Problem

Potential consequences of not addressing the problem include low alumni participation, minimal future financial support to the University, lack of referrals to and top-of-mind awareness of Regis University in the community, lack of community development and support for RHSHP graduates, low collaboration opportunities between RHSHP and Alumni and Parent Relations,

and stress and strain on the Alumni and Parent Relations staff. There are also potential benefits to consider with regard to supporting alumni, although these will result from successful implementation of outreach and exist as items for exploration beyond the scope of this project. Mudie (1978) notes, “if the graduates of a college are happy with the education they received, they can play a significant marketing role” (p. 16). As pointed out above, satisfied and involved alumni provide many benefits to the school, including recruitment and financial support in an increasingly competitive educational marketplace.

Problem Statement

The Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions alumni population is growing more rapidly every year, making it difficult for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department to meet the needs of and support graduates. The purpose of this action research project was to determine effective means to enhance outreach and better serve these alumni. The research included gathering of information from alumni, Alumni and Parent Relations staff members, the staff members of RHSHP, an investigation of past alumni operations, and consultation with sister Jesuit University efforts in this area in order to aid in enhanced conceptualization, prioritization, and effective implementation of alumni services for future development.

Literature Review

A number of published sources report Universities’ recognition of the importance of serving their alumni. For example, University Business (2004) reported that Plymouth State University in New Hampshire launched an alumni portal to serve its approximately 21,000 alumni at the beginning of 2005. The portal will allow alumni the opportunity to do such things as login to the site, view electronic newsletters, create email accounts, conduct online meetings, donate online, and keep an eye on their donation totals. This information represents the growing

number of schools across the nation moving to more technologically advanced ways to maintain contact with alumni and supports the importance of providing such outreach to graduates, as well as the diversity of utilization as presented by the four sister Jesuit schools. The website serves as a tool to reinforce the value of successful relationship building.

Literature focused on alumni associations, organizational change, and the importance of leading change within an organization. For example, Bejou (2005) explores the topic of working with students and alumni from a customer service point of view. The author notes that schools are “sellers offering courses, a degree, and a rich alumni life,” whereas students are “buyers who register for courses, apply for graduation, and make donations as alumni” (p. 44). The article looks at utilizing marketing and customer service concepts in working with students as future alumni through a series of stages focusing on long-term relationship building. This insight supports the importance of developing solid outreach plans for graduate retention from a customer service view, which is a point of consideration for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department at Regis University. Successful alumni associations are stellar at relationship building, and the relevance to implementing such behavior is additionally supported in the following literature.

Singer and Hughey (2002) also comment on the importance of involving students in supporting the mission of the university before they graduate, and share insight on outreach attempts that join alumni and student partnerships in mentoring, career development, campus life, and advancement for the institution by providing an example of philanthropic spirit before the students graduate. According to the authors, “Alumni who have a strong sense of the mission of the institution from which they graduated [tend to be] visibly supportive of that mission in a variety of tangible ways” (p. 52). In addition, they possess “unique needs [and] increasingly are

recognizing the value of learning as a lifelong pursuit,” therefore contributing to their alma mater financially and personally. Singer and Hughey claim that the role of the Alumni Department is to develop and retain this type of behavior.

As universities are places where new thoughts are presented and discussed, innovation is a key concept, and this does not need to solely be limited to academic departments. It can just as successfully dwell in alumni services divisions and departments. Glassman, Moore, Rossy, Neupert, Napier, Jones, and Harvey (2003) explore the topic of innovation within the university setting and the importance of its contribution to advancement, stating, “universities need new directions and ways of thinking about how to operate” (p. 353). Because of limited budgets and other restrictive challenges, the authors invite members of educational organizations to think creatively about addressing the needs of the university by tapping into internal resources, citing academic entrepreneurship as the “seizing of opportunities within a university setting, regardless of resources available,” a concept applicable to developing new, different and appropriate outreach for a university’s varied alumni population (p. 354).

The literature reviewed for the purpose of this project point out several possible innovative approaches to alumni outreach and confirms that alumni relations is an important function of the university.

Entry and Contracting

Entry and contract negotiations involved several key players in the research project process. As Block (2000) notes, “A contract is simply an explicit agreement of what the consultant and client expect from each other” (p. 54). Since the change agent is not employed directly with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, but rather with another part of Regis, entry and contracting negotiations were conducted as though services were from an outside

consultant. The problem was identified and discussed with the Executive Director of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department at Regis University. Following the preliminary articulation of the problem statement and purpose of the action research project, a meeting convened with the Executive Director and the Associate Director of Alumni and Parent Relations to review the proposal, discuss parameters and expectations for the project, and to gain approval for commencement. This established the first meeting of the collaborative group. An approximated time line of events and activities, as well as anticipated needs, was shared with Alumni and Parent Relations. Regular updates were provided to them throughout the course of the project.

Method

According to Cummings and Worley (2001), action research is planned change, “in which initial research about the organization provides information to guide subsequent action” (p. 23). Using action research methodology to address the need for change allows the consultant to more effectively support the process of change by following a specific model, and by collaborating with persons who have varied influence and levels of participation in the current and future situations. As Harris (1995) notes, “Planning is an extension of greater understanding projected into the future” (p. 218). Action research provides information on why the change needs to happen and how that might most effectively occur.

Action research makes available pertinent information for instituting change. According to Winstead (1982), “Planned change. . . deals with developing new and better processes and relationships in response to changing needs and expectations” (p. 20). The key to the process is to discover how that change can best take place. Cummings and Worley (2001) note that the consultant role is to help clients “gain the knowledge and skills to . . . manage the change themselves” (p. 60). Action research assists articulating the phases of planned change, such as

presented by Cummings and Worley (2001, p. 24). The model selected for this research project is the eight-step Cummings and Worley action research model displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Action Research Model from Cummings & Worley

Step #	Activity
Step 1	Problem Identification
Step 2	Consultation with Behavioral Science Expert
Step 3	Data Gathering and Preliminary Diagnosis
Step 4	Feedback to Key Client or Group
Step 5	Joint Diagnosis of Problem
Step 6	Joint Action Planning
Step 7	Action
Step 8	Data Gathering after Action

Note: From Organization Development & Change by T.G. Cummings and C.G. Worley, 2001, p. 24. Copyright 2001 by South-Western College Publishing.

Identifying the Problem

The first step in the action research process is to identify the problem. Initial consultation with the Executive Director of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department resulted in the development of the problem statement articulating the specific need for change. It was agreed to work jointly to address the need for change, in addition to discussion of the role of the change agent in this process as the collector and assessor of data. With this understanding, operations moved forward with the organizing and structuring of the data gathering process, the parameters of the project and the estimated timeline of events, all of which were shared with the Executive Director.

Consulting a Behavioral Science Expert

During this first meeting, the change agent established expectations for regular communication with those persons identified as the collaborative group: the Executive Director and the Associate Director of Alumni and Parent Relations. In addition, the change agent made requests for access to relevant information and internal sources. As the researcher in the process, the change agent must remain aware of his or her role as the consultant and clearly discuss expectations and needs with the collaborative group in order to establish a functional and open client-consultant relationship. As Block (2000) notes, “The personal interaction between the consultant and the client during the initial contracting stages is an accurate predictor of how the project itself will proceed” (p. 69). The scope of the project was regularly kept at the forefront of and allowed for focused pursuit of the end goal.

Validity

Validity, as dictated by Regis University Graduate Programs in the MSM 696 Classroom Module (2005) “refers to the soundness and accuracy of a research study” (p. 33). Using triangulation, defined in the MSM 696 Classroom Module as “the exploration of research questions from different angles and perspectives,” enabled the analysis of varied sources of data to verify the nature of the problem (Regis University Graduate Programs, 2005, p. 35).

This study used data source triangulation, defined as “the use of different data sources” to increase study validity. In this effort, comparison of data was made between the results of the survey, interviews, observation and assessment of evaluations from alumni events.

Data Gathering and Preliminary Diagnosis

The collaborative group discussed the outline for the data gathering process and all members were made aware that the consultant would need their assistance in order to complete

each of these tasks. The change agent distributed copies of the estimated timeline of events to the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, informing them of the planned data gathering techniques for the research process and those individuals whose participation would be required. They received updates throughout the course of the project. The data gathering step of the project also included reviewing past alumni evaluations, publications and practices of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department.

Regular discussions with the Alumni and Parent Relations staff occurred in order to learn of past practices and desires for future development. Data collection methods included interviews with RHSHP faculty and staff, development and distribution of the alumni survey, and the review of activities of sister Jesuit schools and past Regis alumni event evaluations.

Interviews with Members of Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions

The first meeting with RHSHP personnel included a conversation with the Dean of the school and Appendix A illustrates questions used to direct this interview. The Dean of RHSHP suggested an interview with the directors of each of the programs to gain a greater understanding of their roles within the school, as well as a more direct representation of the programs. A draft of the alumni survey was shared with the Dean for review, as well as with each of the directors in order to ensure content validity specific to the many disciplines. This influenced the development of a survey that reflected the varied composition of RHSHP and its graduates. Interview questions were designed to assist in directing each interview effectively and efficiently, so as to respect the limited time of the staff. As Huszco notes, “[m]eetings should have a purpose or they shouldn’t be held” (p. 123). Appendix B displays the specific questions used during the Director interviews, which allowed for gaining insight into the organization as it currently performs and a clearer understanding of the needs and desires of respondents regarding outreach

provided by Alumni and Parent Relations. The timeline of meeting with each of the directors in RHSHP spanned from October through November of 2004.

Survey of Alumni

In addition to interviews, the data gathering process included the distribution of surveys to the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions (RHSHP) graduates. The development of the survey included consultation with the directors of RHSHP, Alumni and Parent Relations staff, and review of current Alumni and Parent Relations Department materials and events in order, as Fink and Kosecoff (1998) state, to “[set] the survey’s boundaries” and “write the correct questions” (p. 9). A select group of alumni pre-tested the survey for content validity, to ensure the relevance and coherence of the questions created. These six individuals were selected as pre-testers as per the recommendation of the Alumni and Parent Relations staff and the Directors of RHSHP. The success of the project required the assessment of what current practices RHSHP graduates value and what additional services might be created specifically for them. Each of the RHSHP program directors reviewed the survey for content validity prior to its distribution to the greater alumni population, as well. Appendix C contains the survey approved by University Relations and distributed to the alumni.

The survey was distributed by mail to the 2,804 graduates of RHSHP, subtracting the individuals who tested it. The deadline for survey return was set for two weeks, however the change agent accepted responses up to three weeks. The flow of surveys received began to slow significantly at this three-week mark. Appendix D shows the memo that accompanied the mailing to outline the purpose of the survey. Seventy-five surveys were returned as undeliverable, which brought the total number successfully distributed to 2,729. Returned surveys totaled 160 for a total response rate of 5.9%, which is a very low response rate for

statistical purposes but which still provided useful information for the collaborative group to consider. Of these 160 surveys returned, 109(68%) were from Nursing alumni, 21 (13%) from HSAM alumni, and 30 (19%) from Physical Therapy alumni. The percentage of graduate respondents as per each program is as follows. Of the 2,599 Nursing alumni, 4% responded to the survey. Of the 367 HSAM alumni, 5% responded, and of the 416 Physical Therapy alumni, 7% responded. Surveys continued to arrive at a slow rate months beyond the deadline, and although they were not tallied as part of the sample in this report, they remain with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department for research beyond the scope of this project.

The survey requested alumni insight on general and discipline specific items, in order to capture both interests shared by the entire alumni population, as well as items desired by alumni as per their individual programs. Graduates were also asked to rate the value of the alumni benefits currently provided by the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, and to select from one of four answers as to how often they have attended alumni events in the past. If alumni had previously attended events, they were then asked to specify their level of satisfaction with the experience of that event.

The secondary data gathering methods for the action research project included a review of current Alumni and Parent Relations Department outreach practices and evaluations, the observation of healthcare related events at Alumni Weekend 2004, review of Regis University Alumni and Parent Relations website, and review of the alumni association websites of four Jesuit sister schools that have healthcare programs. The information gathered here, coupled with the data gathering results from the interviews and surveys, enabled for the consideration and discussion of results and recommendations with the collaborative group from broader perspective.

Results

The following information resulted from the data gathering techniques employed. The results have been gathered, assessed and presented according to each of the program departments within RHSHP.

Dean of RHSHP Interview Results

During the interview (Appendix A), the Dean shed light on the history of the school and the development of various programs. The Dean also noted that The Rueckert-Hartman Report is published twice a year: Spring and Fall and is a school-wide publication featuring news, alumni updates, an article by the Dean, and faculty features. In addition, the Dean noted that people who facilitate internships for Regis students or hire graduates see a difference in their knowledge, capability, and attention to ethics as opposed to those educated hired from other institutions. RHSHP has established a special focus on the topic of ethics and established a Department of Healthcare Ethics in August of 2004, hiring a full-time director in January of 2005. The Dean reports that incorporating ethics into Regis University curriculum not only sets the students and alumni apart from the alumni of other schools, it also reinforces the deep commitment to the Jesuit mission.

Nursing Director Interview Results

The Director reports that, presently, this program does not offer continuing education because the Department does not have time due to annually increasing enrollment in the program (Appendix B). According to the Director, the faculty of the nursing program support the project one hundred percent, as reaching out to alumni is among the goals articulated for the 2004-2005 school year. The survey content was also discussed during this meeting and the Director pointed out that, currently, nursing program students have the opportunity to participate in a mentoring

program through Sigma Theta Tau, a national honor society for health care professionals conducted in coordination through the University of Colorado. Consideration for mentoring opportunities via Regis University alumni specific to nursing might conflict with that which already exists through Sigma Theta Tau. Therefore, the question related to Regis alumni mentoring was removed from the survey sent to nursing graduates.

This Director believed that volunteer opportunities are something in which alumni will likely be very interested. Annually, students participate in both the 9News Health Fair on the University's campus, in addition to the opportunity to travel to a Native American Reservation in Wyoming. This trip fills up so quickly with students, that alumni who desire a repeat experience never have the opportunity to do so. In addition, the students participate in the SUN (Schools in Urban Neighborhoods) Program and provide health education to students in the Denver-Metro area, as well as health fairs at local schools such as Skinner Middle School and Arrupe Jesuit High School.

In addition to volunteer opportunities, the Director believes that alumni will also participate in academic seminars surrounding clinical topics and that faculty would likely contribute to such events. The Director is very interested in collaborating with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, but is currently unable to actually develop the outreach plan. An alumni newsletter is something the Director felt would likely be very beneficial to and well received by the nursing graduates. There is also interest in adding information on events and activities in the Alumni and Parent Relations publications and mailers.

The Department works with a variety of professional organizations both locally and nationally. For example, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) serves as the program's accrediting body and has developed a survey for all of its accredited institutions to

distribute to the students. This survey currently creates a benchmark for measuring student satisfaction in comparison to other schools and assists the Department with recommended improvements. The AACN is discussing the development of such a survey directed toward alumni in the near future for nursing programs across the country.

The Director's desire with regard to how Alumni and Parent Relations can better serve and support the nursing alumni, is to develop a stronger outreach effort, and perhaps hold a kickoff event to initiate the alumni organization for RHSHP. Many graduates get together to maintain contact with one another, however, nothing formal exists and this serves as an area in need of improvement.

Physical Therapy Alumni Faculty Chair Interview Results

The Alumni Faculty Chair from the Physical Therapy (PT) Department is the faculty member currently responsible for sitting on the PT alumni committee, an internal group responsible for maintaining contact with graduates. At the present time, this individual is the chairperson of the committee, and during the interview commented on the lack of provisions for alumni. The Department's contact information for its graduates in the Department database is often incorrect and this Director desires access to an updated, accurate database of active alumni. The Alumni Faculty Chair also described a need for the alumni to feel a part of the University and wants to know how to get them to more regularly update their changing contact information.

The Alumni Faculty Chair reports that the Department sends out a quarterly newsletter on a specific program that transitions non-doctoral students to the Transition Doctor of Physical Therapy program (tDPT) program, accessible via the Regis University website. This newsletter only applies to those for whom the tDPT program is relevant, rather than reaching out to all PT

alumni, so there exists a desire for a newsletter that would foster communication with the greater alumni demographic.

The Alumni Faculty Chair finds that the number one concern shared by alumni is the desire for access to the online library system for post graduation use of journals and other research materials. The Chair of the Physical Therapy Department also noted that the majority of graduates have mentioned they would pay to have access to the online library system. If such a fee were incurred, it was mentioned that perhaps it might go back to directly support the Alumni and Parent Relations Department.

Furthermore, the Chair mentioned that the Physical Therapy Department has conducted alumni events in the past. The first class graduated in 1996 and approximately 50 out of 250 alumni attended a barbeque on site at Regis University. The Chair commented on the lack of clarity on how many individuals actually desire to come back to the campus for events, and it is also unclear how to service the alumni who live out of state and comprise nearly half the population in the program. One of the major concerns, according to this program's leadership, is the varied location of graduates. The idea of an online community surfaced during our discussion as one of the potential suggestions for alleviating this problem, providing graduates with access to faculty academic papers, handouts and presentations, a newsletter, and library access.

There is also an interest in developing a newsletter to reach alumni who have not kept in touch. Again, partnering with Alumni and Parent Relations in order to improve outreach and support to the PT alumni is of great interest to this Department. Overall, the Alumni Faculty Chair believes more similarities than differences exist with regard to the alumni of RHSHP as a whole. Another comment shared revealed that the present participation level of graduates extends to their willingness to work with current students. Presently, students have the

opportunity to be matched up with Regis University alumni during the clinical aspect of their academic program. As the population of the school increases, the number of alumni serving in this role will likely increase as will the need for such individuals to participate in mentorship roles.

Director of Physical Therapy Interview Results

The interview with the Director of the Physical Therapy Program (PT) supported the insight shared by the Alumni Faculty Chair of the program, such as graduates' desire to have access to the library, the importance of supporting alumni, and the need for PT graduates to serve as support roles for PT students. Approximately 50% of the graduates from this program live outside of Colorado. As the Alumni Faculty Chair mentioned, there is a newsletter for the Department specific to the promotion of the tDPT. However, the director also noted that formerly an alumni newsletter did exist, but due to lack of resources and time it has not been continued. The Director was also very insightful with regard to the development of pertinent survey questions for the PT graduates. According to conversational interviews with members of this department, there is considerable interest in developing ways for ongoing alumni support and outreach. The leadership expressed keen interest in partnering with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department in order to make this possible.

Director of Health Services Administration Interview Results

The Director for the Health Services Administration (HSA) and Health Information Management (HIM) shared information that included identifying a newsletter routinely sent out to the alumni of this Department, both graduate and undergraduate, as well as current students. The Director commented on the decision to mail the newsletter rather than email it due to the fact that it seemed easier to keep up-to-date with the alumni and students' mailing addresses than

the email addresses. Approximately 160 students are currently enrolled in this program. These students are non-clinical in their orientation to the health profession and focus primarily on the business and technology side of the field, needing to obtain training in the area of medicine for the purpose of understanding medical terminology and other relevant details that may facilitate effectiveness in their positions working with medical professionals.

This Department seems to have good communication with its alumni, inviting many of them back on occasion to speak to current classes, and many return to join to the faculty. In addition, the HIM program includes an internship, and many alumni welcome current student interns into their places of work for this purpose. Specifically, this Department would like to see a link on the RHSHP page of the website directly to an RHSHP page in the Alumni section with updates and information for graduates. Due to the busy schedules most of the graduates experience in their professional lives, it is believed that unless a speaker or forum were of “celebrity status,” participation from this group is unlikely.

With regard to co-publishing information on events and activities specific to the graduates of this program, the director expressed a desire for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department to coordinate with the Program Coordinator for the HSAM Department to include relevant information in its alumni publications, such as when the state convention and the national convention come to the region. Currently, the Program Coordinator in this area develops and distributes a program newsletter under the guidance of the Program Director, yet there is a desire to expand dissemination of program associated information.

Volunteer opportunities are something these students and graduates already pursue. Annually the students participate in the University’s 9News Health Fair with a booth about how

to request and track one's health information, and certainly the nature of the medical field often allows for various forms of volunteer work.

Chair of Healthcare Ethics Interview Results

Part of the interview process also included meeting with the Acting Chair of Healthcare Ethics, as this department interacts with all RHSHP students as part of core training, and often remains in contact with alumni. The new director will take office in January 2005. This Department provides all of the ethics classes, as required by each program. According to the Acting Director, many graduates of RHSHP come back to teach at Regis, and often will contact the Department when confronted with ethical dilemmas in their workplaces outside of the University. This student body includes a diverse population of beginners and seasoned professionals. There is interest in having alumni back as ethics speakers, or for forums and seminars, in addition to the desire to develop the school and its students and graduates as a community resource.

Assistant Director of Marketing and Admissions Interview Results

The Assistant Director of the Admissions and Marketing Department also provided insight into RHSHP, which allowed for a better understanding of the programs from an outsider's perspective, in that the marketing staff delivers information on programs comprehensible to prospects. This meeting permitted the collection of materials outlining each program, and supported the development and assessment of the surveys, creation of suggestions specific to the uniqueness of each program, and contributed to the understanding of RHSHP.

Surveys

The survey results were tallied for each of the three different programs, and Appendix E depicts the survey with the survey responses received. Overall, the survey results indicate an

interest among graduates in developing alumni events and activities specific to the RHSHP disciplines. All questions, with the exception of Question 8 in Appendix E, reflect the total combined results from all three programs. Question 8, however, asked the respondents to answer only the section that represented their specific program, and the answers are presented in way that depicts their responses.

Methods of communication. As seen in Figure 1, the top two methods preferred by all program graduates for receiving information are the newsletter and direct mail. Fifty-two percent of the graduates (84 respondents) responded in favor of the newsletter. Direct mail followed with 76 responses to equal 47%. Email received 38 responses (24%), the website as a medium of communication received 23 responses (14%) and phone calls were preferred by only 3 respondents (2%).



Figure 1. Alumni preferred methods of communication.

An alumni e-newsletter, *The Regis Report*, is distributed monthly, and invitations, mailers and announcements are sent via direct mail to alumni by the Alumni and Parent Relations

Department. The results of this question suggest that the graduates are satisfied with the current methods of communication practiced by the Department.

Alumni event participation. The next item in the survey asked alumni about the number of times they have participated in alumni events. As per the response to this item, they were then asked to share their level of satisfaction from the experiences. Figure 2 depicts the total combined responses from all respondents as to the frequency of participation. Detailed numerical answers can be found in Appendix E.

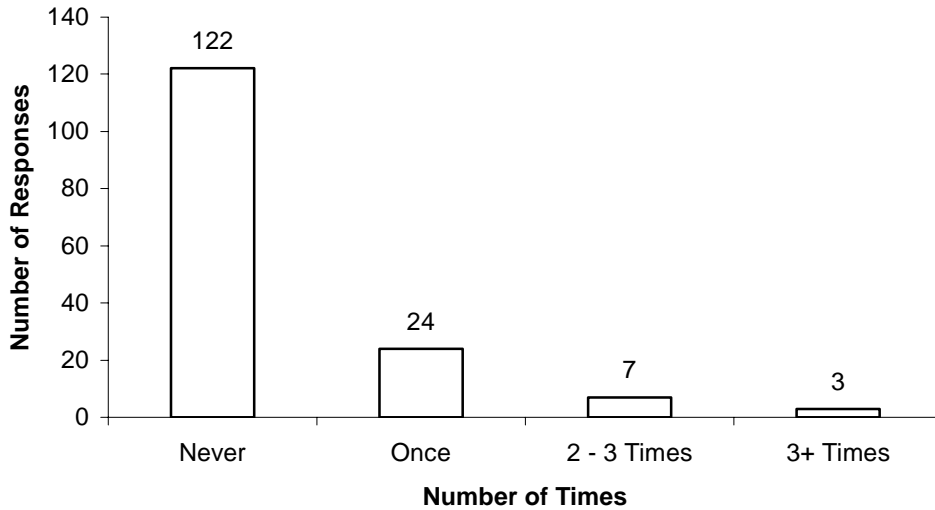


Figure 2. Alumni event attendance.

As Figure 2 illustrates, only 24 alumni have ever participated in anything sponsored by the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, totaling only 15%. Over three-fourths (76%) of alumni respondents have never attended any event. However, the 21% who have attended events reported satisfaction with the experience. As seen in Appendix E, 9 graduates revealed they were very satisfied with the event, and 20, or 83%, responded they were satisfied.

Value of benefits. Graduates were asked to rank the value of the alumni benefits available to them. Figure 3 below illustrates these responses and Appendix E contains the exact number of

responses as given by the graduates for each of the benefits. The benefit with the highest, “very valuable” rating was auditing classes, with a total response of 48, or 30% of the total responses received. The highest “very unvaluable” rating, however, was alumni weekend, which garnered a total of 56 responses, or 35% of alumni.

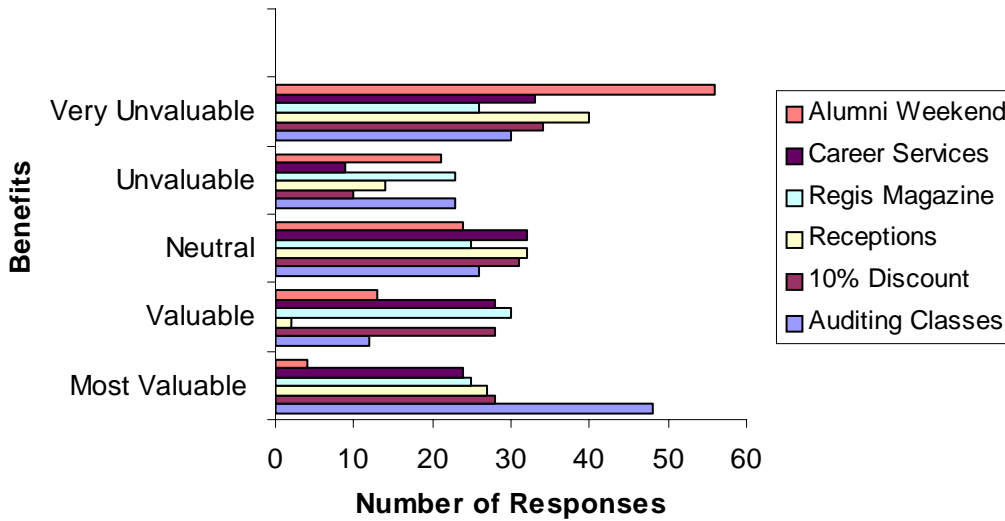


Figure 3. Value of alumni benefits.

Program specific events. As is depicted in the survey in Appendix C and the tallied survey results in Appendix E, in Question 8, the graduates were asked to answer only the likelihood of their participation in events specific to their discipline. In this case, the lists were developed in an effort to see how graduates from each program compared in terms of their interest in varied activities, rather than as a whole. Academic seminars gained the highest number (32) of “very likely” to attend responses from the Nursing alumni. The event gaining the second highest vote for “very likely” from the nursing graduates is a program specific newsletter with 27 responses, or 25% of all nursing respondents. A program specific alumni weekend garnered the highest number (32) of “very unlikely” to attend from nursing respondents.

Appendix E also depicts the likelihood of participation in program specific events by the Health Services Administration and Management graduates. The event receiving the most responses for likelihood of participation among these respondents is a mentoring program with 5 “very likely” responses, or 24% of respondents. Continuing education and networking events both received a total of 4 “very likely” responses for a 19%. The answer receiving the most “very unlikely” responses was for participating in an online community at 9 responses, or 43% of HSAM respondents.

Appendix E illustrates responses given by the Physical Therapy graduates on this item. The event gaining the most “very likely” votes was continuing education at a total of 21, or 70% of the Physical Therapy graduates. This was followed by an interest in a program specific newsletter with 15 responses, or 50% of respondents. Breakfast and lunch events received the highest number of “very unlikely” responses with a total of 13 and 7 respectively, or 43% and 23%.

General events. The collective responses regarding the likelihood of the graduates to participate in general alumni events and activities are depicted in Appendix E. These numbers represent the total responses each event or activity received. The following proportions reported reflect the percent of “very likely” to participate responses. Online library access received the greatest number of responses for likelihood of participation with a total of 65, or 41% of respondents. Additional academic programs followed with a total of 45 responses expressing a high likelihood of alumni participation in this event, or 28% of the total graduates responding. University organized volunteer opportunities garnered a total of 56, or 35% of.

Volunteer representative interest. The final part of the survey invited graduates to share their level of interest in serving as volunteer representatives to work with the Alumni and Parent

Relations Department in the coordination of events for the RHSHP graduates. While the responses under “yes” only totaled 12, or 9%, their existence, and the presence of the “maybe,” at 37 responses, or 25%, suggest that potential for creating such a position or positions to work in alignment with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department exists. The “no” responses at 66% were sizeable, however, not everyone is drawn to such volunteer activities and only a small number of people would be required to fulfill the need. The interested alumni provided their contact information in the designated area on the survey, and the information was passed on to the Alumni and Parent Relations Department.

Secondary Data

Review of current outreach practices and event evaluations was conducted during the development of the survey and continued for a time afterward. Alumni Weekend 2004 provided the opportunity to attend a presentation offered by faculty from the RHSHP Nursing program. This event drew five people, all of whom were graduates of Loretto Heights College. The presentation offered much information and insight into the evolution of the nursing industry and encouraged questions and comments from the attendees. Additional events listed on the Alumni Weekend 2004 schedule reflected several Loretto Heights oriented events, activities geared toward the general alumni population, as well as breakout opportunities for graduates of Regis College and the School for Professional Studies. Other than the nursing presentation, little focused on RHSHP graduates. When dealing with such a varied University demographic, siphoning out activities for each subgroup presents a challenge, especially in such a broad alumni setting. Because the Alumni and Parent Relations Department expressed the need to enhance outreach to the graduates RHSHP, the matter is more a focus on what and how to offer this outreach rather than whether to offer it all.

A review of evaluations received from the Alumni Weekend 2004 also occurred. Of the 63 evaluation forms returned to the Department, none came from RHSHP graduates. Rather, they were divided between Loretto Heights, Regis College and School for Professional Studies graduates. This is not a surprise, however, since the results received from the alumni survey revealed a very small level of participation by RHSHP graduates in general alumni events and activities.

In addition to review of evaluations and previous events, it was important to investigate the current options available to graduates on the Regis University website. This website contains a section reserved specifically for alumni (www.regis.edu/alumni). Upon clicking on the appropriate link, individuals receive a number of choices ranging from how to contribute financially to the University to updating one's information to upcoming events. Alumni can also update the Department as to events in their lives for inclusion in upcoming publications of the *Regis University Magazine*. However, there is not a link from the Alumni pages directly to RHSHP program pages, nor is there any provision of RHSHP specific alumni outreach. Only if an alumnus were to navigate the website into the Nursing section of the Regis University website, would he or she access information on an alumni Job Resource Center. Via this link, students can register with the site, post resumes and update their own information. They can also register as alumni with the site to provide RHSHP with the most up-to-date contact information. Graduates may also search for former classmates via this link as well and is powered by AfterCollege, which has no association with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department (Regis University, n.d. b).

Review of information from the following sister Jesuit schools revealed the extent to which each school's Alumni Association interacts with health care alumni, approaching outreach

in different ways, thereby presenting several points for consideration for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department. This exploration allowed for investigation of what the institutions found success in implementing, and was limited specifically to the investigation of Jesuit schools offering higher education in the health field. Only Jesuit schools were selected and assessed in their approach to serving the unique population within their alumni communities to keep commensurate with the context of the Jesuit mission.

For example, Creighton University (n.d.), located in Omaha, Nebraska, is well recognized for its medical and health care programs. The School of Pharmacy and Health Professions has its own page in the Alumni Relations section of the University website (Creighton University, n.d.). According to information retrieved from this site, Creighton offers a School of Pharmacy & Health Professions Reunion Weekend, which includes health care specific seminars, continuing education classes (which span a four hour period), an alumni mass and reception, and dinner. In addition, alumni receive recognition via the presentation of the Alumni Merit Award annually at this event. There is also an option to view the *Creighton Magazine* electronically, search for Alum News, and return to links for general alumni information, events, “Alumni Online,” and volunteer opportunities. These school specific options are items Regis University could consider for its future website developments, giving its alumni better access to applicable activities and communication.

Loyola University Chicago is located in Chicago, Illinois. This school offers a variety of general alumni outreach including travel opportunities and a mentoring program. Among the options for navigating this site (Loyola University Chicago, n.d.), the alumni can select a preferred constituency group, such as nursing, which then pulls up information and updates specific to alumni of that school. This page offers school updates, information on upcoming

seminars, activities and a travel opportunity specific to the nursing discipline. The School of Nursing offers two Alumni Awards. There also exists a section of the website geared toward graduates of the Stritch School of Medicine, which offers its own alumni outreach. Similar to Creighton's focused outreach and communication to its health care graduates, Loyola offers a similar effort at distinguishing their graduates as unique from the traditional academic population. Offering similar recognition to RHSHP graduates as separate from the alumni of the other Regis University schools is something Regis could find useful as its RHSHP alumni populations continues to grow and enter the workforce.

A third school explored in the Jesuit community is Marquette University, located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Marquette Alumni Association has a presence on the University website (Marquette University, n.d.) allowing alumni to register for a login, update their profiles and list contact information. The College of Nursing Alumni Association features a Chapter President, an alumnus of the program. Alumni can search Chapter Resources, and access the Alumni Calendar of Events, the College of Nursing Alumni Association Boards, Career Services and the College of Nursing Website. The Marquette University Nursing Alumni Association (MUNAA) has a detailed website including a Welcome from the Dean and a posting of the group's objectives specific to the graduates of this school (Marquette University, n.d.). The MUNAA has a Board of Directors exclusive to its School, as well as officers, including the President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The School has its own publication that features MUNAA information, in addition to School news, and is published twice a year. Regis University might want to consider exploring the possibilities of a separate board and alumni association in the future, if the population of RHSHP grows to a point where maintaining it as its own association makes sense. Until such expansion occurs, however, it might be a good first step to list alumni

activities and events for RHSHP as separate from Regis College and SPS within the alumni section of the website to accommodate new outreach that is developed.

Finally, the fourth school researched is St. Louis University (St. Louis University, n.d.), located in St. Louis, Missouri. St. Louis has a School of Nursing Alumni Board and officers filling positions of President, Vice President and Secretary. The specific page of the University website listing information on a Calendar of Events, also provides access to details on Alumni Boards, Alumni Services, and clubs in many cities across the U.S. featuring the contact information of the local club president. The club officials, however, are not necessarily specific to the School of Nursing, but rather represent the University as a whole in their specific region (St. Louis University, n.d.). In addition to alumni events, the University offers a speaker series specific to Nursing or the health professions, such as Physical Therapy, as well as provides alumni a variety of travel opportunities from a University-wide perspective. Ideas presented here, such as a speaker series specific to the healthcare profession might be useful considerations for Regis University's Alumni and Parent Relations Department to consider, and perhaps if interest warrants in the future, to develop an RHSHP Alumni Board.

Reviewing what these schools offer their alumni was an effort to provide additional ideas for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, rather than benchmark. What is being done at these four schools might not be appropriate for Regis University, however it is worth exploration as conversations continue on the subject of enhancing outreach.

Discussion

Feedback to the Client

Whereas the data gathering process provided information for developing strategic direction for Alumni and Parent Relations specific to the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health

Professions (RHSHP) alumni, sharing the results with the client enabled a discussion of next steps. As Reynolds comments in Riggio and Orr's (2004) *Improving Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations*, "strategy does drive success" (p. 216). The recommendations developed as a result of assessing information allowed the consultant to not only share findings but to support the suggestions as well. It uncovered the current level of satisfaction of active alumni, the directors of RHSHP, and the Alumni and Parent Relations Department with the activities available. This process allowed for a wider understanding of the problem, as well as the needs and wants of the RHSHP alumni by streamlining the information search.

Upon completing the review of all information gathered, the change agent developed suggestions for the Alumni and Parent Relations Department for implementation of planned change. The change agent conducted the review and summary of the data gathering results and shared the information with the Alumni and Parents Relations staff. At this time, the collaborative group discussed the results and reviewed the recommendations provided by the change agent. This then led the collaborative group to diagnose the problem and begin talking about possible solutions to this problem based upon the results of the data collection conducted by the change agent.

Joint Diagnosis of the Problem

The next step of the process required that the collaborative group diagnose the problem. Hanson and Lubin (1995) describe diagnosis as "a search for what is going on now in the department" (p. 125). The collaborative group determined a diagnosis of the current problem jointly: the need to open communication with RHSHP in order to best serve alumni. Based on the data gathered, the group decided upon the next steps for moving forward with improvements. Since the Alumni and Parent Relations Department holds the responsibility of implementing and

following-through with the planned change after the completion of the project, the staff members needed to participate and find value in this diagnosis.

Recommendations

Feedback with the client serves as the fourth step in the selected action research model. As Block (2000) notes, this step is where the consultant “present[s] a clear and simple picture of the current situation and present[s] . . . recommendations” (p. 227). The assessment and review of the results, and comparative research between Regis University’s Alumni and Parent Relations Department and those of Jesuit sister schools allowed for the creation of several recommendations for discussion. Review of results, a joint diagnosis of the problem, discussion of options and strategy development occurred during a meeting with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, which transitioned the collaborative group from the feedback stage to the diagnosis stage, and finally led to the planning stage.

The recommendations selected revolved around the restricted budget of Alumni and Parent Relations, the limited staff, and the need to improve communication with RHSHP. These recommendations attempted to consider a variety of circumstances in order to offer the most thorough approach possible for alleviating the problem and planning for the future. As Haines (1998) notes, “[s]ystems thinking begins with the end in mind” (p. 106). Each of these recommendations exists as a necessary addition to the Department. However items such as time, financial resources and additional support ultimately will influence the order of precedence of the recommendations, as each item suggested possesses potential enhancement opportunities.

Recommendation One

The first recommendation is to add staff to develop and maintain relationships with the alumni, faculty and leadership of RHSHP. The Department should consider hiring additional

staff in order to effectively accommodate the growing number of RHSHP graduates. This suggestion derives from the conversations with the staff of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department and RHSHP leadership, with regard to the depth of development needed and the articulated lack of time and support in both areas. The survey results and review of the websites of other Jesuit schools imply a significant amount of work will be involved in order to launch and sustain efforts, in order to meet alumni needs and innovate to enhance alumni offerings. For example, the St. Louis University website reveals that there is not only an alumni board, but also a “University Liaison” who is also the Associate Director of Alumni Relations (St. Louis University, n.d.) The recommended new staff person’s responsibilities would include development of discipline specific volunteer opportunities, seminars or workshops both on campus and perhaps even online, and the coordination and disbursement of updates and information both in RHSHP and Alumni and Parent Relations publications.

Recommendation Two

The second recommendation is for Alumni and Parent Relations to forge a closer relationship with RHSHP. The following offers some ideas for implementing this option. The Directors interviewed in RHSHP commented on the desire to collaborate with Alumni and Parent Relations in mailings and publications, as well as sharing alumni contact information. As Singer and Hughey (2002) note, “Today’s student and alumni affairs professionals are actively engaged in a number of mutually beneficial institutional activities on behalf of students” (p. 52). In this light, communication should become more open and regular between the two facets of Regis University in order to seek ways to best serve alumni while drawing on the insight and expertise of both areas.

Furthermore, establishing an RHSHP exclusive Alumni Board or enhancing current representative positions for alumni on the general alumni board would also enable improvement in the support to RHSHP. These individuals would serve as liaisons between the graduates and leadership of RHSHP and the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, working with each to establish opportunities for growth, development and participation based upon individual knowledge of and academic experience at Regis. Many of the schools researched possess such roles for graduates and the survey suggested there exists a level of interest by alumni for pursuit of this option. For example, St. Louis University's Health Sciences Alumni Association entails an Alumni Board with a "President, President Elect and Secretary" (St. Louis University, n.d.). Careful selection of alumni volunteers is important in order to effectively develop the roles. If the addition of staff support occurs in the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, this staff person can then coordinate with the representatives as well as the leadership of RHSHP to take alumni offerings to the next level.

Additional considerations for enhancement includes suggestion for Alumni and Parent Relations to collaborate with the Career Services Department in the development of a mentoring program, since there exists some interest on behalf of RHSHP graduates in this area, specifically for the PT and HSAM programs. In addition, the Department can explore ways to involve current RHSHP students in alumni program activities in order to initiate communication between Alumni and Parent Relations and future RHSHP graduates. According to Singer and Hughey (2002) "Partnerships between student and alumni affairs . . . provide opportunities for students to observe and model the behavior and actions of involved alumni" (p. 65). This in turn, assists in enhancing student leadership skills by putting them in contact with professionals associated with the school. It is likely that the students who possess interest in alumni programs during their

undergraduate years will emerge as the kind of people the University will benefit most consistently from in alumni leadership position. It would be helpful to involve these individuals in the development of activities and events so that they look forward to participating and can help to promote participation by their contemporaries. Singer and Hughey further comment that “alumni who were members of major student organizations while in college tend to give back more to the institution after graduation,” and therefore feel a stronger tie to the school beyond their academic tenure (p. 65). Consideration for this type of outreach exists as a viable and useful recommendation, as well.

Recommendation Three

The surveys and the interviews clearly implied that graduates desire online access to the library for research and continuing education purposes. In light of the Jesuit ideal of life long learning, such an addition to alumni support is essential in, as seen in *University Business* (2004), fulfilling an effort to provide a “lifelong connection to the school” (p. 28). Exploration into the possibilities of bringing an online benefit to the graduates of RHSHP as well as Regis University as a whole is something highly encouraged as a result of the data gathering process.

In addition, the Department should consider development of an online community. This coupled with expansion of the current alumni section of the website would create a section specific to the alumni of RHSHP. Furthermore, the RHSHP alumni section would offer links to the various pages of the RHSHP section of the website, driving alumni, current students and prospective students to explore the community available beyond graduation. This special section of the website could contain updates specific to RHSHP outreach, in addition to an electronic version of the *Regis University Magazine* and access to archival versions. Down the road, expansion of this could extend to even broader provisions. In addition, the existence of this

community would enable graduates living out of state to connect more with former classmates within their specific disciplines, and perhaps even encourage a spreading of RHSHP activities beyond the Lowell Campus.

Finally, the Alumni and Parent Relations staff members should plan a meeting approximately one year from the date of the first implementation an RHSHP activity. They should also maintain enough flexibility to allow for any unexpected results from the changes that might hinder progress. Nothing should be written in stone, and the strategic direction should be available for revision when something does not work as expected. In addition, discussion surrounding the level of need and relevance of each suggestion made above should continually occur in order to ensure the implementation of the most appropriate efforts. Measuring the level of success of any outreach effort can include regular communication and collaboration with RHSHP, the development of RHSHP specific events, increased attendance at alumni events, and enhanced communication with alumni. Distribution of a survey to test the level of satisfaction of RHSHP alumni could offer effective follow-up.

The final step in the action research model requires the assessment of the action taken after a certain period of time. The recommendation is for Alumni and Parent Relations to measure success via the gathering of information post implementation, when appropriate, by way of follow-up surveys, review of events and efforts conducted as a result of action. For example, increased participation by RHSHP alumni in events, as well as perhaps a better response rate for future surveys, would be possible indicators of successful improvement in outreach efforts.

Action Plan Selected

Since the Alumni and Parent Relations Department does not employ the consultant, the final two steps of the model will occur outside of the action research project. The conversation

on the results and recommendations as per the action research project led the collaborative team to decide that Recommendation Two, opening communication between Alumni and Parent Relations and RHSHP leadership in order to foster collaboration, was, at this time, the best selection for a variety of reasons.

Joint Action Planning

At this time the collaborative group discussed next steps. Since the Alumni and Parent Relations Department does not employ the consultant, the group needed to determine how the consultant's work would end and how the project would adjourn. Based upon the recommendations outlined by the consultant, the collaborative group selected the most feasible process for implementation. In this step the Alumni and Parent Relations Department needed to recognize that the power to create change resided with the senior members of the Department. As Winstead notes, "[e]ffective planned change cannot . . . be brought about solely by outsiders" (p. 20), but rather needs the primary staff members to internalize it. At this point in the process, the staff should prioritize and commit to making change happen, finding enough meaning to invoke action.

Before any significant progress toward the enhancement of specific outreach opportunities can occur, a closer relationship must develop with RHSHP and the Alumni and Parent Relations Department. The co-development of events, for example, will enable the Alumni and Parent Relations Department to arrange the best course of action bearing in mind the current situation and the need to improve collaboration with RHSHP. Open communication will create a foundation for expanding outreach efforts to the graduates and encourage the maintenance of flexibility and regular conversation about the status of the action. Winstead (1982) notes that the implementation of change should be gradual, "but it should also be

consistent and deliberate” (p. 29). The need to enhance outreach to RHSHP graduated has been articulated by the staff of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, and it is their responsibility to initiate action.

Evaluation of Alternatives

The Alumni and Parent Relations Department informed the change agent that they cannot hire additional staff at this time. As recommended, with RHSHP’s continued growth and the expanding number of graduates, the staff should revisit the topic of hiring additional staff support. This conversation needs to emerge in future University Relations conversations since the graduates of RHSHP possess different needs and interests than graduates of the other schools, requiring a slightly different approach. Bejou’s (2005) review supports the importance of developing relationships with students and alumni, revealing that the transition from student to alumni is where “the school must maintain contact by continuously improving alumni relations through activities, recognition and incentives” (p. 46). Hiring a staff member to focus on facilitating this transition and developing relationships with the alumni, as well as the leadership of RSHP, will become increasingly necessary as the alumni population grows. The success of the outreach development will affect the level of support, commitment and participation with which RHSHP graduates relate to Regis University in the years to come.

The establishment of an online community and online library access for graduates will require time, funding, and additional research. However, this is a suggestion that should occur in the near future. As stated in the article by University Business (2004), the Director of Alumni Relations at Plymouth State University supports this recommendation in stating that “the alumni portal is Plymouth’s way of providing lifelong connection to the school” (p. 28). This option for alumni at Regis University will become more pressing as time passes and is something the

University should pursue for the purpose of retaining the loyalty of the graduate population. Recommendation Two, opening communication between RHSHP leadership and Alumni and Parent Relations, will establish a much needed foundational relationship that will promote the development of the alternative suggestions as conversations between the two departments improves.

Reflective Analysis

Although this paper reflects extensive collaboration throughout the project, it is worthwhile to note that the duration of the research involved teamwork from all parties involved. The interview with the Dean of RHSHP opened the doors of communication with the leadership of the school out of which additional significant information and insight resulted. The directors of the programs within RHSHP shed light on their areas of expertise and provided helpful direction in the creation of the survey as well as background on the RHSHP population. Furthermore, the alumni consulted during this time offered valuable information and assistance in the gathering of pertinent data. The Alumni and Parent Relations Department worked closely with the change agent throughout the course of the project and reserved time on a regular basis to support, discuss and assist in the progress of the research. The project experience saw great support and collaboration from all influential areas contacted throughout the duration of the research effort.

The alumni who tested the survey for content validity expressed genuine enthusiasm and an interest in helping with the project. Overall, it was a great pleasure to be involved in this project and coordinate with all parties who influenced its data gathering and completion. Both RHSHP leadership and the staff of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department provided a

wealth of information and time toward the development and completion of this project, which suggested a great investment in the desired change.

This overall experience was positive. Partnering with the collaborative group allowed for a broader perspective and approach than working alone on research would have provided. I am grateful to the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, and to the staff, students and graduates of the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions for permitting me to work on this subject. Winstead (1982) comments that planned change “is designed to alleviate fear and uncertainty and to foster excitement, institutional renewal, and personal and organizational growth” (p. 30). Such efforts can foster relationships and conversation, thereby setting a platform for collaborative innovation. Hopefully, something similar will occur with the findings from this research.

One of the most significant lessons learned during this process included the realization that the project took on a life of its own. I had to adapt to the processes and the pace that existed by the very nature of the project itself. I could set approximated timelines for the completion of each item, yet needed to also remain flexible to accommodate the dynamics of working with several different people and varied schedules. It also became apparent on several occasions that I needed to remember to work within the scope of the project, as there were many opportunities to expand in new directions. I had to remember that this project was for a specific scope and continue to work within its means. It was disappointing to receive such a low return rate with the surveys. Had I known what I know now, I would have made room in the timeline to accommodate a second mailing. This might have influenced the response rate. Having experienced the research process firsthand, though, I have gained a greater awareness of what it entails, and a much broader perspective of the entire project, rather than each deliverable. This

experience is invaluable and will influence the way in which I organize and engage in future research opportunities, as well as define the scope of the project. Organizational behavior is dynamic, and cannot be controlled in every aspect. Since this project took on a life of its own and helped me to become more flexible and open to what the process had to teach me as it led me down paths I could not see from the starting point.

Conclusion

The Alumni and Parent Relations Department at Regis University must enhance its outreach to the graduates of the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions. The existence of this need was expressed by the staff members of the Alumni and Parent Relations Department, and recurred through the graduate surveys and the interviews with the leadership of RHSHP. In light of the articulated need for change, research was conducted in an effort to determine effective ways in which enhancement could take place and offer insight on alumni areas of interest. The recommendation selected by the project's collaborative group suggested that open communication between Alumni and Parent Relations Department staff members and the leadership of RHSHP would be a good first step in developing a successful outreach plan.

Hopefully out of such collaboration, events and activities can be developed to target this specific population of graduates, in light of industry specific uniqueness from the alumni of the University's other two schools. This will require open communication, collaboration, and innovation in order to effectively provide for the alumni of RHSHP. As Brinckerhoff (2004) states, "[I]nnovation is the engine of improvement" (p. 12). Things must be done differently for this group of alumni because the current outreach provided to the University's alumni as a whole is failing to serve the RHSHP graduates. Furthermore, collaboration can bring about a success and creativity that can flourish for generations to come. For as Lowney (2003) comments,

“[I]ngenuity disposes people not just to think outside of the box, but to live outside of the box”
(p. 281). Through a joint effort to foster change, RHSHP, the Alumni and Parent Relations
Department, and the graduates can exemplify such an attribute to grow and project influence on
the future.

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Appendix A

Dean Interview Questions

1. Can you share with me a brief history of RHSHP?
2. How many students are currently enrolled in RHSHP?
3. Are there any specific faculty members with whom you would recommend I talk?
4. Do you conduct an exit survey to upcoming graduates?
5. Has RHSHP coordinated with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department in terms of promoting events or information in publications?
6. To what degree does RHSHP participate in Alumni Weekend?
7. Do you have any insight as to what might be useful for the RHSHP graduates, based upon your knowledge of the program and current goings-on in the industry?
8. Do you find that there are constituencies that graduates have created themselves?
9. Where could I learn about the certification courses RHSHP offers for continuing education?
10. Is there anything specific you would like to see happen for alumni?

Appendix B

Director Interview Questions

Nursing Director Questions

1. What is your role in the school?
2. How many students are currently enrolled in your program?
3. Are there any specific faculty members with whom you would recommend I speak if necessary?
4. What would you like to see offered for the nursing graduates with regard to alumni events, activities, opportunities, outreach and communication?
5. Are there continuing education classes for nursing?
6. What are some of the challenges you foresee with trying to create outreach for RHSHP alumni?
7. With regard to a survey that will be sent out by Alumni and Parent Relations, what are some items you would like to see included?
8. Who organizes the News Health Fair and would it be possible for Alumni and Parent Relations to help you publicize and assist in recruiting alumni volunteers?
9. How can Alumni and Parent Relations best work with you and serve your school, students and graduates?
10. Do you know of any groups of alumni that meet on their own presently?
11. What professional organizations do nursing graduates and professionals belong to?
12. When do they meet and where? Are they local or national?
13. What volunteer organizations is the school (or alumni) involved with?
14. Do you see that masters/graduate students have different alumni needs than the undergraduate population?

Physical Therapy Director Questions

1. What is your role in the school?
2. How many students are currently enrolled in your program?
3. Are there any specific faculty members with whom you would recommend I speak if necessary?
4. What would you like to see offered for the physical therapy graduates with regard to alumni events, activities, opportunities, outreach and communication?
5. Are there continuing education classes for physical therapy?
6. What are some of the challenges you foresee with trying to create outreach for RHSHP alumni?
7. With regard to a survey that will be sent out by Alumni and Parent Relations, what are some items you would like to see included?
8. How can Alumni and Parent Relations best work with you and serve your school, students and graduates?
9. Do you know of any groups of alumni that meet on their own presently?
10. What professional organizations do graduates and professionals belong to?

11. When do they meet and where? Are they local or national?
12. What volunteer organizations is the school (or alumni) involved with?

Health Services Administration & Management (HSAM) Director Questions:

1. What is your role in the school?
2. How many students are currently enrolled in your program?
3. Are there any specific faculty members with whom you would recommend I speak if necessary?
4. What would you like to see offered for the HSAM graduates with regard to alumni events, activities, opportunities, outreach and communication?
5. Are there continuing education classes?
6. What are some of the challenges you foresee with trying to create outreach for RHSHP alumni?
7. With regard to a survey that will be sent out by Alumni and Parent Relations, what are some items you would like to see included?
8. How can Alumni and Parent Relations best work with you and serve your school, students and graduates?
9. Do you know of any groups of alumni that meet on their own presently?
10. What professional organizations do graduates and professionals belong to?
11. When do they meet and where? Are they local or national?
12. What volunteer organizations is the school (or alumni) involved with?

Appendix C



RUECKERT-HARTMAN SCHOOL
FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS
ALUMNI SURVEY

*Regis University Alumni Association
February 2005*

Alumni Survey

1. Please mark the level of the degree you completed at Regis University:
 Undergraduate Graduate Doctoral

2. Please mark the program in which you completed your degree:
 Nursing Physical Therapy Other (Please Explain) _____
 Health Services Administration & Management

3. How do you prefer to receive information from Regis University regarding Alumni Events? (Select all that apply)
 Newsletter Website Phone Calls
 Email Direct Mailings

4. How often have you participated in Alumni events in the past?
 Once 2-3 times More than 3 times Never

5. If you have participated in Alumni events, how satisfied were you? (If you have not participated, continue to question 6).
 Very Satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Neutral

6. Please rate the value of your current Alumni Benefits on a scale of 1-5
(1 being most valuable, 5 being least valuable)
____ Auditing Classes
____ Career Services
____ Alumni Weekend & 5-year Anniversary Celebrations
____ 10% Discount in the Regis Bookstore
____ Invitations to Nation-wide Receptions, Sporting Events and Lectures
____ Free Subscription to Regis University Magazine

7. What is your most vivid memory of your experience and education at Regis University?

8. Please rate the degree to which you would likely participate in the following alumni opportunities. *Complete the section specific to your discipline using the following scale:*

1 = Very Likely 2 = Somewhat Likely 3 = Unlikely 0 = Very Unlikely

Nursing:

- Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)
- Breakfast/Lunch Events
- Networking Events
- Social Events
- University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)
- Online Community
- Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter
- Speaker Series/Panels
- Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend
- Other (Please Explain)

Health Services Administration:

- Continuing Education/Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)
- Breakfast/Lunch Events
- Networking Events
- Social Events
- University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)
- Online Community
- Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter
- Speaker Series/Panels
- Mentoring Program
- Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend
- Other (Please Explain)

Physical Therapy:

- Continuing Education/Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)
- Breakfast/Lunch Events
- Networking Events
- Social Events
- University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)
- Online Community
- Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter
- Teleconference Seminars
- Speaker Series/Panels
- Mentoring Program
- Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend
- Other (Please Explain)

9. Please rate the degree to which you would be likely to participate in general alumni opportunities using the following scale:

1 = Very Likely 2 = Somewhat Likely 3 = Unlikely 0 = Very Unlikely

- ___ Networking Events
- ___ Academic Seminars (external from discipline)
- ___ Personal Fitness Workshops
- ___ Travel Abroad
- ___ University Organized Volunteer Opportunities
- ___ RHSHP Alumni Newsletter
- ___ RHSHP Alumni Weekend
- ___ Online Community/Discussion Board
- ___ Online Library Access
- ___ Additional Academic Programs
- ___ Spiritual Enrichment/Retreats
- ___ Other (Please Explain)

10. Would you be interested in serving as a volunteer Alumni Representative in coordinating with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department on behalf of your program if the opportunity were to become available?

Yes No Maybe

Comments: _____

Would you like to update your contact information?

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Work Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

Preferred Email: _____

Appendix D

February 7, 2005

Dear Health Care Alumnus/a,

We want a piece of your mind!

The enclosed survey invites you to share your insight on alumni activities and offerings specific to your experience in health care education. This survey is part of a research project aimed at determining effective ways to provide for and support the graduates of Regis University's health programs.

This survey is sponsored by the Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions and the Regis University Alumni Association. The Alumni Association exists to:

- Promote alumni involvement in the advancement of Regis University
- Provide opportunities for intellectual, social and spiritual enrichment
- Promote traditional Jesuit values & life-long learning
- Offer you opportunities specific to your unique discipline

Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed envelope by **Monday, February 28**. You will notice the abbreviation "RHSHP" appears throughout the survey to represent the recently-renamed "Rueckert-Hartman School for Health Professions."

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for helping us to enhance the Alumni Association's efforts to meet your needs and interests.

Sincerely

Executive Director
Alumni and Parent Relations

Project Coordinator
RHSHP Alumni Research Project

Appendix E

Alumni Survey

1. Please mark the level of the degree you completed at Regis University:

98 Undergraduate **47** Graduate **14** Doctoral

2. Please mark the program in which you completed your degree:

109 Nursing **30** Physical Therapy **0** Other (Please Explain)

21 Health Services Administration & Management

3. How do you prefer to receive information from Regis University regarding Alumni Events? (Select all that apply)

84 Newsletter **23** Website **3** Phone Calls

38 Email **76** Direct Mailings

4. How often have you participated in Alumni events in the past?

24 Once **7** 2-3 times **3** More than 3 times **122** Never

5. If you have participated in Alumni events, how satisfied were you? (If you have not participated, continue to question 6).

9 Very Satisfied **20** Satisfied **0** Dissatisfied **4** Neutral

6. Please rate the value of your current Alumni Benefits on a scale of 1-5
(1 being most valuable, 5 being least valuable)

___ Auditing Classes

1 = 48 **2 = 12** **3 = 26** **4 = 23** **5 = 30**

___ Career Services

1 = 24 **2 = 28** **3 = 32** **4 = 9** **5 = 33**

___ Alumni Weekend & 5-year Anniversary Celebrations

1 = 4 **2 = 13** **3 = 24** **4 = 21** **5 = 56**

___ 10% Discount in the Regis Bookstore

1 = 28 **2 = 28** **3 = 31** **4 = 10** **5 = 34**

___ Invitations to Nation-wide Receptions, Sporting Events and Lectures

1 = 27 **2 = 22** **3 = 32** **4 = 14** **5 = 40**

___ Free Subscription to Regis University Magazine

1 = 25 **2 = 30** **3 = 25** **4 = 23** **5 = 26**

7. What is your most vivid memory of your experience and education at Regis University?

Open Ended Answers

8. Please rate the degree to which you would likely participate in the following alumni opportunities. *Complete the section specific to your discipline using the following scale:*

1 = Very Likely 2 = Somewhat Likely 3 = Unlikely 0 = Very Unlikely

Nursing:

___	Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)			
1 = 32		2 = 41	3 = 12	0 = 16
___	Breakfast/Lunch Events			
1 = 8		2 = 30	3 = 31	0 = 29
___	Networking Events			
1 = 13		2 = 36	3 = 23	0 = 25
___	Social Events			
1 = 8		2 = 26	3 = 33	0 = 31
___	University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)			
1 = 11		2 = 41	3 = 21	0 = 26
___	Online Community			
1 = 15		2 = 25	3 = 24	0 = 31
___	Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter			
1 = 27		2 = 25	3 = 22	0 = 23
___	Speaker Series/Panels			
1 = 19		2 = 32	3 = 23	0 = 22
___	Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend			
1 = 10		2 = 18	3 = 32	0 = 32
___	Other (Please Explain)			
	No answers reported			

Health Services Administration:

___	Continuing Education/Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)			
1 = 4		2 = 7	3 = 2	0 = 6
___	Breakfast/Lunch Events			
1 = 2		2 = 4	3 = 4	0 = 6
___	Networking Events			
1 = 4		2 = 6	3 = 2	0 = 4
___	Social Events			
1 = 1		2 = 3	3 = 6	0 = 6
___	University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)			
1 = 3		2 = 2	3 = 5	0 = 6
___	Online Community			
1 = 1		2 = 3	3 = 6	0 = 9
___	Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter			
1 = 3		2 = 6	3 = 2	0 = 5

___	Speaker Series/Panels			
1 = 2		2 = 7	3 = 1	0 = 7
___	Mentoring Program			
1 = 5		2 = 2	3 = 2	0 = 7
___	Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend			
1 = 3		2 = 2	3 = 3	0 = 7
___	Other (Please Explain)			
No answers reported				

Physical Therapy:

___	Continuing Education/Academic Seminars (specific to discipline)			
1 = 21		2 = 1	3 = 1	0 = 0
___	Breakfast/Lunch Events			
1 = 2		2 = 9	3 = 13	0 = 7
___	Networking Events			
1 = 4		2 = 13	3 = 7	0 = 5
___	Social Events			
1 = 3		2 = 11	3 = 10	0 = 6
___	University Coordinated Volunteer Opportunities (specific to discipline)			
1 = 6		2 = 14	3 = 6	0 = 3
___	Online Community			
1 = 10		2 = 12	3 = 5	0 = 3
___	Program-Specific Alumni Newsletter			
1 = 15		2 = 10	3 = 4	0 = 1
___	Teleconference Seminars			
1 = 8		2 = 11	3 = 9	0 = 3
___	Speaker Series/Panels			
1 = 13		2 = 13	3 = 3	0 = 1
___	Mentoring Program			
1 = 9		2 = 13	3 = 6	0 = 1
___	Program Exclusive Alumni Weekend			
1 = 4		2 = 21	3 = 4	0 = 1
___	Other (Please Explain)			
No answers reported				

9. Please rate the degree to which you would be likely to participate in general alumni opportunities using the following scale:

1 = Very Likely 2 = Somewhat Likely 3 = Unlikely 0 = Very Unlikely

___	Networking Events			
1 = 11		2 = 40	3 = 41	0 = 45
___	Academic Seminars (external from discipline)			
1 = 14		2 = 44	3 = 34	0 = 45

___	Personal Fitness Workshops			
1 = 15		2 = 39	3 = 36	0 = 51
___	Travel Abroad			
1 = 12		2 = 42	3 = 33	0 = 53
___	University Organized Volunteer Opportunities			
1 = 12		2 = 56	3 = 34	0 = 40
___	RHSHP Alumni Newsletter			
1 = 19		2 = 39	3 = 29	0 = 53
___	RHSHP Alumni Weekend			
1 = 5		2 = 37	3 = 37	0 = 55
___	Online Community/Discussion Board			
1 = 17		2 = 37	3 = 29	0 = 32
___	Online Library Access			
1 = 65		2 = 31	3 = 19	0 = 28
___	Additional Academic Programs			
1 = 49		2 = 55	3 = 28	0 = 32
___	Spiritual Enrichment/Retreats			
1 = 19		2 = 34	3 = 37	0 = 53
___	Other (Please Explain)			
	No answers reported			

10. Would you be interested in serving as a volunteer Alumni Representative in coordinating with the Alumni and Parent Relations Department on behalf of your program if the opportunity were to become available?

13 Yes **100** No **37** Maybe