INCREASING ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AT
DELAWARE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Christine B. Gillan

An education leadership portfolio submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Christine B. Gillan

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ABSTRACT

Since Delaware Technical Community College opened its doors over five decades ago, over 50,000 people have graduated from the institution. There are currently 15,000 students enrolled at campuses statewide, and since 97% of those students are Delawareans, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who could be engaged to become involved with the College once they graduate. Delaware Technical Community College could benefit significantly from increased alumni engagement. My goals were to engage graduates to serve as role models and mentors for students and inspire them to complete their degrees, provide internship and networking opportunities, volunteer at events and activities that raise funds and project a positive image in the community, and act as ambassadors in the community promoting Delaware Tech as a high quality education choice. I recommended four strategies to increase alumni engagement at the College. The first was to improve Delaware Tech’s website to engage alumni more effectively. The second was to create and implement an alumni social media plan. Creating a college-wide alumni engagement task force was the third strategy, and the final strategy was hosting additional alumni events and inviting alumni to participate in existing campus events and activities. After reviewing best practices, I worked with Delaware Tech’s web manager to make significant improvements to the alumni pages of the College website. After the new alumni pages were launched, an e-newsletter was sent
to the current alumni email list of 12,436 addresses inviting them to visit the newly
designed alumni website. In order to implement the second strategy to create an alumni
social media plan, I recently hired a social media manager (a new position in my
division) to work with the vice president for institutional effectiveness and development
and me on this initiative. Although we currently have alumni followers on all of our
channels, social media will be an important tool to increase engagement. In order to
implement my third strategy, I have recommended establishing a college-wide alumni
engagement task force with representatives from all of the divisions in the College with
additional representation from the Instruction and Student Affairs Divisions. This group
will create and implement a strategic plan for alumni engagement. Additionally, I have
recommended that alumni be invited to participate in existing events and that events
should be created to increase alumni involvement. Moving forward, it will be important
for Delaware Tech leaders to continue to explore creative ways to keep alumni engaged.
Social media is just one example of a communication method that is constantly changing.
It will be vital to keep a dialogue going with students, staff, faculty, and alumni about
what will keep them engaged with the College.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Alumni engagement is an area that community colleges have historically neglected, but in an era of reduced state and community resources, it has become a new priority for many institutions across the nation. Since Delaware Technical Community College (Delaware Tech) opened its doors over five decades ago, over 50,000 people have graduated from the institution. There are currently 15,000 students enrolled at campuses statewide, and since 97% of those students are Delawareans, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who could be engaged to become involved with the College once they graduate.

My work examined how we can engage community college alumni to become involved with the College in order to: serve as role models and mentors for our students to inspire them to complete their degrees; provide internship and networking opportunities; volunteer for and support events and activities that raise funds and project a positive image in the community; and act as ambassadors in the community promoting Delaware Tech as a high quality education choice. Delaware Tech is committed to student success and increasing graduation rates, but there are many unique challenges faced by community college students. If alumni were more engaged with the College, it could give current students additional support and inspiration to complete their degrees.
In an effort to find out how to be successful at increasing alumni involvement, I first reviewed selected literature on best practices for alumni engagement that mostly focused on two-year and four-year higher education institutions. I then gathered data from current students and alumni through a program evaluation, student survey, and alumni focus groups at each of the College’s campuses. I also interviewed five subject matter experts in the field, looked at existing engagement practices at the College, and examined best practices for alumni websites. Finally, I created a professional development plan and an action plan for implementing best practices.

Artifacts

This portfolio contains nine artifacts that demonstrate these efforts to gather information that will help the College improve alumni engagement. The artifacts include:

1. Synthesis of Selected Literature: The goal of this review was to understand issues, challenges, and best practices regarding engagement of community college alumni. The literature focused on the differences and similarities between community colleges and four-year institutions, the value of community college alumni engagement, and the importance of engaging current students as future alumni. The literature also revealed opportunities for engagement identified by research and other institutions, as well as best practices for communicating effectively with alumni (see APPENDIX A).

2. Program Evaluation of the College’s Distinguished Alumni events: The process question for this evaluation was “To what degree do students feel that the
Distinguished Alumni Celebrations inspire them to persevere and continue to work toward their academic goals?” The outcome question was “What percentage of students who attended the celebrations in Georgetown had registered for the next semester of classes, and what is the relationship between attendance at celebration events and registering the following semester?” The sample for the evaluation consisted of the 15 students who attended the Distinguished Alumni Celebration in January 2017 and the six students who attended the event in September 2016 at the College’s Owens Campus in Georgetown. Students were asked to complete an anonymous and optional survey. The process question was measured by six Likert Scale statements about the students’ perceptions of how inspiring and educational the event was to them. The outcome question was answered by a question at the end of the survey. The goal was to find out if the celebrations have an impact on student perseverance and success (see APPENDIX B).

3. Alumni Engagement Activities: The objective of this artifact was to examine the current outreach efforts at Delaware Tech, which included an alumni magazine, events, and a year-long series of celebrations for the College’s 50th anniversary. The paper also includes the history of community colleges and alumni relations, as well as best practices by community colleges across the country. Personnel and resource limitations, as well as recommendations for additional outreach by the College are also included (see APPENDIX C).
4. Subject Matter Expert Interviews: In an effort to collect best practices in alumni relations that have been effective at engaging alumni, I interviewed five subject matter experts. Four of them are employed by four-year universities, and one is the headmaster of a local private school. The objective of these interviews was to identify initiatives that can be implemented at Delaware Tech in order to improve alumni engagement. Two of the individuals had completed their doctoral dissertations on the subject. The paper includes a table outlining what the experts reported during the interviews and which questions had common answers (see APPENDIX D).

5. Student Engagement Survey: Literature strongly suggests that higher levels of student engagement lead to higher levels of alumni engagement. (Hall, 2016) In addition to relationships, experiences are an important part of a student’s feelings about an institution. In order to create outreach initiatives to engage current students, I needed to find out what kinds of activities students would be interested in. The goal of this survey was to provide data to inform which initiatives would be most successful in attracting student involvement that could lead to increased alumni involvement once they graduate. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 801 students responded, representing roughly 5% of the student population. The most popular initiatives identified by the students included participating in a community service project, receiving resume assistance in the Career Services Center, attending networking events with students from their academic major, and participating in a career fair (see APPENDIX E).
6. Alumni Focus Group Report: I conducted three focus groups of Delaware Tech alumni – one in each county - to ask them about their Delaware Tech experience, their interests in alumni engagement, and their communication preferences. The objective was to find out how they would like the College to engage them and if they were interested in becoming involved with Delaware Tech as alumni. A total of 49 alumni participated in the three sessions. There were graduates from every decade that the College has been open. Each group was diverse in age, gender, and academic major. All were currently employed, and some were also continuing their education at other higher education institutions. The end of the report contains recommendations based on input from focus group participants (see APPENDIX F).

7. Website Improvement Plan: The objective of this artifact was to explore best practices on college websites to engage alumni, as well as conduct a comparison of six college alumni websites including Delaware Tech’s. Kolowich (2017) asserts that a college website is the front door of the campus and needs to attract and inform current and prospective students, their families, alumni, professors, and donors. She further states that an effective website needs to be user friendly, convey value to different personas, and be attractive and engaging. The report outlines the improvements that were made to the College’s website as a result of this work. These changes included a link for alumni on the homepage, videos of alumni in their workplaces, a link to the online magazine, news stories about alumni, an alumni event calendar, and other additions (see APPENDIX G).
8. Professional Development Plan: The goal for this paper was to create the
curriculum for a one-day training program at Delaware Tech that would educate
faculty and staff about strategies for engaging alumni, inspire them to become
part of a college-wide effort, and create a new culture that values alumni
involvement. There will also be an employee survey prior to the training to allow
them to share their ideas, which can be included in the curriculum. There is also a
plan to evaluate the training, as well as measure and report outcomes. The
curriculum was developed according to principles and best practices identified in
professional journals. (see APPENDIX H).

9. Alumni Engagement Action Plan: This plan was created to recommend initiatives
that can be implemented at Delaware Tech to engage alumni. The
recommendations contained in this action plan were informed by literature on the
topic, as well as interviews with subject matter experts, focus groups with
Delaware Tech alumni, student surveys, an evaluation of an annual alumni
celebration, examinations of college websites, and a review of existing alumni
engagement programs. The initiatives include improving Delaware Tech’s
website to engage alumni more effectively, creating and implementing an alumni
social media plan, creating a college-wide alumni engagement task force, hosting
additional alumni events and invite alumni to participate in existing campus
events and activities, and conducting professional development in alumni
engagement. A table at the end of the plan contains objectives for each part of
each initiative, as well as implementation strategies, measures of success, timelines, and group members involved (see APPENDIX I).
Chapter 2

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

Since the College was founded, it has graduated over 50,000 students statewide, but, similar to community colleges nationwide, it has historically done a poor job at alumni engagement. There are many challenges that these institutions face in improving alumni engagement. A study by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) revealed some hurdles to overcome. Researchers found that many community college employees working in alumni relations roles had less than two years of experience working in the field. Less than 60 percent of survey respondents maintained a dedicated annual budget for alumni relations. And many community colleges lacked updated contact information for most of their alumni (CASE, 2014).

Additional challenges include the fact that many community college graduates pursue degrees beyond their associate degree and develop long-term relationships with those higher education institutions. Other graduates enter the workforce immediately, and if their community college is ineffective in reaching out to them, most lose interest in being involved.

The literature also indicates that the community college experience itself presents challenges. “The early community college student experience can be described as
‘transactional’ or ‘nomadic.’” Institutions need to better understand how to transform these students into “alumni settlers” who will remain involved with the institution once they complete their academic program (Starace, 2012).

Although higher education institutions typically reach out to graduates in order to secure them as donors, there are additional ways that alumni engagement can be beneficial for Delaware Tech. The College’s low graduation rate is similar to most community colleges nationwide, which is the result of the many unique challenges faced by community college students. Alumni could be engaged to provide our students additional support and inspiration to complete their degrees.

Currently there are very few initiatives in place to connect alumni with the College and our students. In order to effectively engage alumni, a comprehensive plan is needed that involves administrators, faculty, and staff at all levels.

Delaware Technical Community College is the state’s only community college and has campus locations in Georgetown, Dover, Newark, and Wilmington. The College was founded in Georgetown in 1966 and just recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. The other campuses opened their doors in the early 1970s.

The College currently serves roughly 15,000 students annually in its academic programs and approximately 36,000 Delawareans a year if workforce training, enrichment programs, and summer camps are included. Delaware Tech’s mission states, “Delaware Technical Community College is a statewide multi-campus community college committed to providing affordable, open admission, post-secondary education
that is relevant and responsive to labor market and community needs. The College offers comprehensive educational opportunities that contribute to the economic vitality of the State, including career, general, developmental, and transfer education; workforce development; and lifelong learning. The College respects its students as individuals and as members of diverse groups and is committed to fostering student success in higher education as a means to economic and personal advancement” (Delaware Technical Community College, 2017).

The College is different from other higher education institutions in the state for many reasons. Open admission provides opportunities for students that might not be ready for a four-year university. They can take developmental classes and get more individualized attention. The College has over 260 articulation agreements as part of its Connected Degree program that allow associate degree graduates to transfer seamlessly as juniors to four-year institutions in the region. Additionally, the College is continually responsive to the workforce needs of Delaware with more than 2,100 industry experts serving on 84 advisory committees. Programs are created when the need for those skills exists, and programs are discontinued when there is no longer a demand for that expertise. Finally, over 97% of Delaware Tech students reside in Delaware, and most stay in Delaware after they graduate.

In carrying out its mission to provide access to education, the College awarded over $5.6 million in scholarships to over 9,000 students in the last 10 years. That, combined with the Student Excellence Equals Degree (SEED) Scholarships and Pell grants, allows nearly 70% of Delaware Tech students to graduate debt free.
Student success remains a concern, however. The retention rate for first-time, full-time degree seeking students was 61% from fall 2015 to fall 2016. The retention rate for first-time, part-time degree seeking students was far worse at 37%. Graduation rates for first-time, full-time students within three years was 14.2%. While this is not uncommon for community colleges, where many students drop to part-time status and take longer to complete their degrees, it still should be improved. Community college presents challenges that are different from residential four-year institutions. Our students need additional support to succeed. There are currently programs in place to provide support for needs such as childcare, transportation, financial aid, counseling, learning communities, developmental classes, and tutoring. An alumni engagement effort could provide additional support that can motivate and inspire our students to persevere to graduation.

Some Delaware Tech graduates get jobs immediately in their fields, and others take advantage of the Connected Degree program. Delaware Tech’s most recent post-graduate survey revealed that 37% of our associate degree graduates enrolled at 85 senior institutions after graduating in 2016.

Although there are alumni association chapters at each campus and a college-wide alumni association, membership has remained very low and stagnant. The College has an extremely large, untapped group of graduates that could be engaged to become actively involved in a variety of ways that could benefit current students.
When I began looking into community college alumni engagement, I was the director of communication and planning at Delaware Tech’s Jack F. Owens Campus in Georgetown. Serving as the liaison with the Owens Campus Alumni Association was part of my job. In addition to attending their meetings, I worked with them to host events including the Distinguished Alumni Celebration, the Women’s Day Celebration, and a picnic for graduates on the day of commencement rehearsal.

In January 2017, I became the director of strategic communication in the Office of the President, and in October I was named vice president for strategic communication and marketing. In this role, I am responsible for marketing and public relations in addition to government and community relations for the College. In recent months, I have worked collaboratively with the vice president of institutional effectiveness and development to engage alumni. One example of our efforts is the posting of alumni profiles that we collected during the College’s 50th anniversary celebration on the College website and on social media. We also include alumni profiles in Delaware Tech Magazine, which is mailed to homes statewide twice a year. Although these initiatives help us promote the quality and success of our graduates, they are examples of one-way communication that do not necessarily cause alumni to engage with the College.

I am responsible for Delaware Tech’s social media channels, which include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, and Linked In. I also work with marketing and public relations professionals on each campus to host events and communicate with internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, I work with other college administrators, faculty and staff to support student success.
The goal of this work was to examine strategies and implement initiatives that will be successful at engaging Delaware Tech alumni to play an important role in our efforts to increase student success and to act as ambassadors that communicate the quality of the College in the community.
Chapter 3

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

An institution’s alumni base can be a valuable source of support that if utilized properly can provide a wealth of opportunities for a college (Vanderbout, 2010). Alumni already know and understand what makes the institution special. Once they understand what the organization needs, they can provide support in a variety of ways, such as recruiting students, participating in events on campus, mentoring students, wearing school-branded products, and even seeking additional education themselves.

McAlexander (2001) also asserts that loyal alumni can be a valuable asset for institutions because they can provide personal recommendations that can help build enrollment, offer donations, participate in events, wear college clothing, and invest in additional education.

Alumni can also be important to the image of an institution, as well as its growth and success. They communicate this through distinction in their careers. When they speak in classes, mentor students, hire graduates, and refer students, they are exhibiting the quality of the education that they received (Vanderbout, 2010).

Literature on alumni engagement, as well as a program evaluation, student surveys, and alumni focus groups were used to provide rationale for the strategies...
recommended. Additional information was collected through subject matter expert interviews, a review of existing strategies, the examination of best practices for website engagement, and literature on effective curriculum development.

As a result of all of the information gathered, I developed and recommended four strategies:

1. Improve Delaware Tech’s website to engage alumni more effectively.
2. Create and implement an alumni social media plan.
3. Create a college-wide alumni engagement task force.
4. Host additional alumni events and invite alumni to participate in existing campus events and activities.

The following evidence supported the development of each strategy and informed my recommendations.

**Strategy 1: Improve Website**

According to literature, the importance of a college or university’s website should not be underestimated. Beyond attracting new students, an institution’s website is “part of its very identity – and an online extension of its physical location” (Web Design Degree Center, 2015). With this in mind, a website communicates the college’s priorities as well. While recruiting students is a high priority for most institutions and guided the redesign of Delaware Technical Community College’s website six years ago, there are additional targets that can and should be reached using this very important tool.
Kolowich (2017) asserts that a college website is the front door of the campus and needs to attract and inform current and prospective students, their families, alumni, professors, and donors. She further states that an effective website needs to be user friendly, convey value to different personas, and be attractive and engaging.

The home page is key in engaging visitors. Prior to this effort, there was not a link dedicated to alumni on the Delaware Tech home page. The way that a user found alumni information was by using the “Giving” link. While I found this to be the case on a few other higher education institution websites I visited, most of the sites identified as the best college websites by various marketing and consulting firms have a link for alumni on the home page. Buried links are a problem because they communicate the lack of importance the institution places on that topic or group of users. (University Business Magazine, 2004) Thus, targeting alumni with a link that is dedicated to them communicates that the College is making them a priority.

Colleges that have received awards for their websites, including the Rhode Island School of Design and Middlebury College, have multiple resources available for alumni. Some of these features include information on volunteer opportunities, alumni association meetings and events, career services, alumni profiles, and an online magazine. They also recommend offering opportunities for alumni to share their stories or update contact information.

Focus groups revealed that Delaware Tech alumni want access to many of those features. They want to volunteer at and attend events. They want access to career
services. They expressed their willingness to attend student events like open house and new student orientation. They’re interested in sharing their experiences with current students in order to help them succeed by being mentors, providing internships, and speaking in classrooms. They want to read the magazine, but they want to do it online. They were interested in reading about other alumni on the website.

In addition to reviewing literature and facilitating focus groups, I compared six different college websites to see what their alumni engagement pages contained. The University of Delaware had the most engaging alumni page, but the Community College of Philadelphia was not far behind. Delaware Tech was similar to Delaware State University, Rockland Community College, and Mesa Community College in the type of features that are offered to alumni. However, Delaware Tech was the only institution that did not have direct access for alumni from the home page (see APPENDIX G).

Strategy 2: Social Media Plan

The use of social media can engage alumni and drive them to the College’s website. Social media drives less than five percent of traffic to higher education websites. (Joly, 2016) She cites two possible explanations for this: the lack of calls to action on the website and the absence of effective cross-channel tracking.

This initiative was also informed by best practices at other institutions, including the Luoma Leadership Academy at Minnesota State University and Columbus State Community College (CSCC). Both institutions focused on using social media effectively,
designing a clear and comprehensive alumni website, increasing communication with graduates, and engaging alumni to participate in meaningful ways.

In 2017, Delaware Tech consolidated all social media channels from separate campus platforms into one college-wide channel per social media platform. This made it much easier to provide links on the home page of the website to the College’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, and LinkedIn accounts. Recently, the College has been reaching out to alumni with advertisements for alumni events on LinkedIn, which should result in more alumni traffic on the website. However, a social media plan that includes specific strategies to engage alumni in a variety of ways would greatly improve communication.

Focus group members also supported increased use of social media to communicate with them. Although the majority preferred email, some said that social media was also effective at engaging them. One respondent asked for both when she said, “One thing Penn State does is they send you an email with kind of a snapshot of what the article is about. And then you click on the link, and it takes you to a social media page or the article online.”

Interview responses from subject matter experts also recommended using social media to communicate with alumni. More than one respondent said that social media should be used effectively to connect alumni with online forms to update their contact information. Because of the challenge of attracting graduates to follow their social media
channels, they said that the best way to achieve this is to get current students to follow the College’s social media and retain their attention after they graduate.

Strategy 3: Alumni Engagement Task Force

Lippincott (2011) stresses the importance of involving faculty in collaborative efforts because for many alumni, their strongest connection to the institution is not with the administration, but with the faculty.

In addition, a report created at the 2012 Leadership Institute at Columbus State Community College entitled Alumni Engagement Summary Report: Reconnecting Experience and Service Across Generations, recommends establishing a cross-department steering committee to focus on alumni engagement (Team Mauritius, 2012).

Additionally, information from focus groups supported this strategy. Since my job at the College does not allow me much contact with students, I reached out to department chairs and alumni chapter presidents to help me invite alumni to participate in the focus groups. Many members mentioned their positive experiences with specific staff and faculty and said that they came to the sessions because those individuals had reached out to them. This indicates that alumni are more likely to be engaged when contacted by individuals with whom they feel a connection.

The idea of a task force was also mentioned in answers from subject matter experts. It was a common theme that, due to the reality of scarce resources, an institution needs to get alumni engagement assistance from others who are not necessarily in the alumni relations division. They recommended working with people from other divisions.
such as student affairs, instruction, development, and marketing to recruit alumni. One respondent stated that she had assembled a working group made up of people from all areas of her university. They meet four times a year to brainstorm ideas or alumni engagement and to report back on what’s working and what’s not.

One idea for the task force to consider should be conducting professional development in alumni engagement for faculty and staff statewide (see APPENDIX H).

The College has typically neglected the opportunity to take advantage of the fact that many faculty members would enthusiastically participate if they were asked to help identify alumni who could be engaged to mentor a student, speak in a class, or offer an internship opportunity. Alumni relations have historically been the responsibility of divisions outside of instruction, and there has never been a major effort to involve faculty in such an initiative.

This valuable connection was reinforced by the focus group members, who said that they were especially interested in staying involved with faculty, alumni, and current students in their major.

In addition, all five subject matter experts stressed the importance of cooperating with people from different divisions on campus so that alumni can be engaged in a variety of events and activities that are already going on. They stressed that alumni want to want to be engaged, but many times institutions forget to ask.

If the task force decides to provide professional development to increase outreach efforts, the curriculum should be based on all of the key tenets of Understanding by
Design recommended by Wiggins and McTighe (2011), but some of these will be more significant. The goal of the training would be to develop and deepen understanding by our employees about the importance of alumni engagement and best practices that they can use to contribute toward the effort. It will also be important that employees demonstrate their learning through authentic performance. In addition, the curriculum design will be planned starting with long-term desired results through a three-stage process, and teachers will serve as coaches of understanding as they focus on ensuring learning, not just teaching. The process of learning should be interactive so the teachers will receive feedback throughout the training from participants.

If carried out effectively, professional development could inspire faculty and staff to become actively involved in engaging alumni.

Strategy 4: Host Events

Literature is very supportive of this strategy. According to a Columbus State Community College report, the benefits of community college alumni engagement include: enhanced visibility and participation on campus; alumni serving as speakers in classrooms or at conferences; increased networking opportunities for current students; word-of-mouth promotion of the college’s programs that could increase enrollment; and access to potential volunteers and mentors (Team Mauritius, 2012).

Research conducted by the Luoma Leadership Academy at Minnesota State University revealed fundamental components of a successful alumni association. One component was hosting alumni networking opportunities, which could include a wide
variety of events. Class reunions, social gatherings, ribbon-cuttings, graduations, hall of fame events or other gatherings that celebrate alumni, 5k walk/runs, holiday events, and volunteering opportunities should be communicated to alumni in an effort to keep them informed and connected to the college.

Skari and Ullman (2012) assert that alumni should be invited to all kinds of events— not just alumni events. Attending events at their alma mater strengthens their ties to the institution and its programs. An example of this is “Breakfast with Bobby” at Virginia Western Community College. Alumni are invited to spend time with the college president, local industry leaders, faculty, and administrators at different locations throughout the community. One was held at a local hospital, where alumni were also able to mingle with hospital administrators. Another took place in a nursing home, where the CEO later donated money to create a new nursing scholarship.

In addition to events and traditions, there are other opportunities to engage alumni in meaningful ways. Mcalexander (2001) recommends including alumni in tutoring and mentoring programs, as well as rituals that might take place at the beginning, middle, or end of a semester. He asserts that alumni respond well to messages and programs that convey the message that alumni opinions are valued. He states that people maintain relationships in which they feel they are treated fairly and that the resources they provide are reciprocated.

Student surveys also indicated that this strategy is important. Some of the most popular answers regarding what they’d like to do as graduates included attending
networking events with students from their academic major, attending an annual alumni picnic, sharing their experiences with prospective students at Open House, and mentoring a student.

During the focus group sessions, the fifth question asked them to discuss what programs would encourage them to become involved with helping current students. Several at each session responded that they would like to participate in a mentoring program, and others said that they would be willing to speak in a classroom. Some expressed interest in participating in information sessions and open house. “Since we all love Delaware Tech, we can be good representatives to talk to prospective students. We have those real life stories to share.”

The groups were then asked if they had any interest in volunteering for or attending special events on campus, and if so, which ones? A few participants in each group stated that they didn’t know that they could volunteer for events like 5k races or fundraisers. One said, “I’d love to volunteer, but I’ve never been asked.” There was also interest expressed about participating in community service projects, a panel discussion, a picnic for graduates, open house, and new student orientation. One participant stated, “I think the individual events are easier to commit to because you feel like I can commit to that date, that time, versus when I sign up for something that’s more longstanding.”

More than one subject matter expert also recommended having alumni speak in classes. This could include representatives from the Alumni Association talk to students about benefits they can enjoy through the association while they are students. These
programs could include mentoring, networking, and other opportunities to meet graduates. Also recommended was having alumni speak in classes associated with their academic major in order to inspire students to persevere and complete their programs.
Chapter 4

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES RESULTS

According to an article entitled “President’s Perspective: Overcoming the Undervaluing of Alumni Relations” by John Lippincott, president of the Council on Advancement and Support of Education, alumni relations is often treated as the stepchild of advancement, when it should be treated as the cornerstone of advancement. His article states that graduates are among an institution’s greatest assets and perhaps the only asset guaranteed to grow every year. “Alumni are the single largest sources of philanthropic support for many, if not most, schools and colleges, and their value extends well beyond financial contributions,” he states. “They are advisors, advocates, and allies in support of institutional mission, highly motivated not only by loyalty, but also by a vested interest in seeing the equity of their diplomas grow over time.”

When I began examining this topic, Delaware Technical Community College, similar to most community colleges, did not make alumni relations a high priority. In the past two years, that has changed. Historically, there had been one small alumni association at each campus. However, two years ago, the College established a college-wide alumni association with the goal of uniting alumni statewide under one umbrella.
Additionally, there have been major strides in obtaining contact information for alumni; however, the database only contains a small percentage of graduates due to a lack of personnel and resources available to track down alumni information.

The first two strategies recommended in this paper should be instrumental in increasing alumni engagement by improving two-way communication with graduates. Having a social media plan focused on alumni will improve engagement and will also drive followers to a new and improved alumni website where they can obtain information about the College, events, fellow graduates, and career services. Most importantly, they can fill out forms to volunteer or attend events and update their contact information.

The next two strategies involve faculty and staff in efforts to reach out to alumni. Lippincott (2011) also stresses the importance of involving faculty in collaborative efforts because for many alumni, their strongest connection to the institution is not with the administration, but with the faculty.

The results of my efforts in each of these strategies are described below.

Strategy 1: Improve Website

Delaware Tech’s web manager and I worked together to make improvements to the alumni pages of the website. The former page contained information about the alumni association and listed the benefits of being active in the association. It featured profile stories of alumni that were gathered during the College’s 50th anniversary. It also
provided links to the Delaware Tech Magazine and social media channels. There was also a link to order transcripts.

The new pages provide the following:

1. A link for alumni from the Delaware Tech homepage
2. A more engaging banner photo with a friendlier welcome message
3. Two new videos of alumni in their workplaces
4. Links to share updated contact information, volunteer for events, register for lifelong learning opportunities, purchase College merchandise, or make a donation
5. A calendar of alumni events with links to registration
6. Links to media stories about alumni
7. Information about the Distinguished Alumni Award with a link that allows visitors to nominate someone
8. A calendar of Alumni Association meetings on each campus
9. Contact information for alumni relations professionals at each campus

The alumni profile stories, information about the benefits of being in the Alumni Association, and a link to order transcripts were retained on the site, but were incorporated into the new design.

After the new alumni pages were launched, an e-newsletter was sent to the current alumni email list of 12,436 addresses inviting them to visit the newly designed alumni website. The former website had 838 page views with 671 unique page views in a little
less than a year from January 2, 2017 to December 14, 2017. During the first month of the new site from December 14, 2017 until January 14, 2018, there were 2,079 page views with 1,678 unique page views.

**Strategy 2: Social Media Plan**

One of the first major changes I made after starting my current position was to consolidate all of the College's social media channels. Prior to that, we had campus-specific Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn accounts. Once we created college-wide channels and eliminated the campus ones, we reached out in magazine ads, on the website, and with emails to encourage people to follow our new platforms. As part of this effort, we began focusing more on LinkedIn as a tool to connect with alumni. We updated the logo and worked with LinkedIn to move all of the previous followers into one account.

The College hosted its first major alumni event in November 2017. The event consisted of a tour and reception at Camden Yards, where the head groundskeeper is a Delaware Tech graduate. In addition to emailing invitations to an alumni list, we placed paid advertisements on LinkedIn. These ads were somewhat effective at reaching our target audience, as they resulted in 144 clicks through to the event website. Because this was our first attempt at using LinkedIn to target alumni, I think engagement could improve with an increased presence in the future.

Although we have alumni followers on all of our channels, we need to increase engagement. First, we want to attract more followers. More importantly, we need a
strategic plan to not only attract them, but to actively engage them with increased interactivity. To that end, I recently hired a social media manager (a new position) in the Office of the President. One of her first projects will be to work with the vice president for institutional effectiveness and development and me to create a social media plan to engage alumni.

Strategy 3: Alumni Engagement Task Force

Currently there are approximately seven individuals responsible for development at the College. Alumni relations is only a small part of their job. Due to this lack of resources, as well as the fact that most graduates feel connections to faculty and staff instead of administrators, it is vital to involve others in the process of engaging alumni.

This task force has not been appointed yet, but once established, it will be responsible for creating a strategic plan for alumni engagement. They will be charged with increasing alumni engagement in events involving prospective and current students. The group should include representatives from all divisions, but should be led by the deans of student affairs and include significant representation of faculty from the Instruction Division and counselors from the Student Affairs Division because they tend to have stronger relationships with the students than employees in other roles. Other divisions represented should include Development, Strategic Communication and Marketing, Business Services, Information and Instructional Technology, and Workforce Development and Community Education.
The task force will be presented with information from this ELP, but will also be tasked with collecting information and ideas from other community colleges. They will then create a strategic plan aimed at engaging alumni in meaningful ways that help existing students, such as having them speak in classrooms or events on campus, participate in 5k races and other fundraising events, volunteer for student events such as open house and new student orientation, and act as mentors for our students. There will be other ideas for engagement that will likely come from the information gathered by task force members, so the ones that are approved will be part of the strategic plan as well.

This group will meet monthly as they collect additional ideas, create the plan, implement the plan, and collect preliminary evaluation of the efforts. Once the outreach efforts are in place and working, the task force will become the Alumni Engagement Committee and meet every other month. Members will be appointed for one-year, two-year, or three-year terms. When new members are selected, they will be appointed for three-year terms. This will allow the committee to get new members without everyone leaving at once.

Strategy 4: Host Events

The reception and tour of Camden Yards was the first major alumni event hosted by the College. Held in November 2017, it was attended by almost 200 alumni and their guests, many alumni who had not maintained contact with the College. It provided a unique opportunity to re-connect with them. Many enthusiastically agreed to speak to our videographers that evening about their memories of the College and how Delaware Tech
had changed their lives. Following the event, an email from the president was sent to alumni who had attended, sharing photos and providing them with a link to a form where they can share their story and update their contact information. Due to the success of the Camden Yards reception, the board of trustees and the Development Division are planning to host another off-site event in the near future.

Additionally, there is now an effort to align the Distinguished Alumni Award celebrations so that they follow the same model in each county. The awards events are now combined with the scholarship luncheon, which includes scholarship donors and student recipients. This change, along with future emails directing alumni to the website, where there is increased visibility of the award, as well as nomination forms, will allow additional students to be inspired by successful alumni.

Increased social media engagement combined with the website improvements are now more effective at communicating with alumni about career services, special events like 5K races and galas, and networking opportunities.

In light of information contained in literature and feedback from subject matter experts focus groups, and student surveys, I have recommended that Delaware Tech host networking events for alumni to meet students in their academic area. Current students could benefit from talking with graduates in their field of study. They can gain information about their future careers and benefit from the experience of alumni. Students can also learn about internship or job opportunities.
Finally, since the College just celebrated its 50th anniversary, I’ve recommended that Delaware Tech invite alumni from the first graduating class from 1969 to attend a reception and be part of the 2019 commencement processional, which is a popular and meaningful tradition at the University of Delaware according to Lauren Murray Simione, associate vice president for alumni engagement and annual giving. Delaware Tech included one graduate from each decade in one of its 2016 commencement ceremonies, and the individuals who participated expressed appreciation at being included. Most of them had not worn regalia for a very long time, and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

These are just a few of the events that alumni can be invited to participate in. Additional opportunities should be considered at the campus and college-wide level for meaningful involvement from alumni. As the College continues to reach out to alumni, obtain updated contact information, and re-connect with them, alumni involvement in events should continue to grow.
Chapter 5

REFLECTIONS ON IMPROVEMENT EFFORT

Historically, community colleges across the country have not invested time and resources in alumni engagement. When I started collecting information on this topic, Delaware Tech was doing very little to engage alumni. There were alumni boards on each campus, but there was almost no effort to reach out to graduates to get them involved in events or activities.

Although the College is now focusing more attention on alumni engagement, we have a lot of work to do. Improvements to the alumni pages of the website have resulted in positive changes in engagement. In just one month there were over twice as many page views as there were in the entire year before the improvements. As we continue to promote the website to alumni, it will play a significant role in re-connecting graduates with the College.

A social media campaign targeting alumni will help us drive traffic to the new website, as well as engage alumni in whatever platforms they choose to follow. It will be another major factor in achieving the improvement goal because it will communicate information that alumni care about. Prior to creating this plan, the College’s social media channels focused primarily on current students.
Although some of the other strategies are still in the infancy stage, I have confidence that the goal will be achieved because of input from alumni focus groups, student surveys, subject matter experts, and literature. I also think we will be successful because the College and the board of trustees are now making alumni engagement a high priority. This support makes it much easier to implement these strategies.

I think it is important for the task force to consider ideas that have worked at other similar institutions. One example is outlined in “The Great Alumni Hunt” (2014) on the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) website. The Victor Valley College Foundation in Victorville, California, launched a month-long outreach campaign to reconnect with college alumni. They assembled 20 teams of volunteers – each consisting of a foundation student intern, a community member, and a college faculty or staff member. The teams were challenged with locating as many alumni as they could in a month to get them to provide their contact information and share stories and photographs. At the end of the contest, the winning team won a $2,500 scholarship for its student intern, with $500 scholarships going to the next five runners up. They found 1,157 alumni, most of whom were not in their donor records.

It is also important for the task force to do a great deal of information collection before hosting professional development for other members of the faculty and staff. They need to have a strategic plan that is specific and comprehensive before they involve others in this college-wide effort. I do recommend that they include professional development, however, because engagement will be exponentially more successful if employees enthusiastically participate.
When I started my work on this project, I was the director of communication and planning at Delaware Tech’s Jack F. Owens Campus in Georgetown. One of my responsibilities was to act as a liaison between the campus alumni board and the College. I sat in meetings with the alumni board members, and they were frustrated at the lack of participation, but no one knew what to do to attract and engage alumni. In addition, as previously mentioned, leadership was focusing attention and resources in other areas.

Currently I serve as the vice president for strategic communication and marketing in the Office of the President in Dover. Alumni relations falls under the responsibilities of the vice president for institutional effectiveness and development. My role has changed, but I am still involved in alumni relations because the website, social media, marketing, and public relations are all in my division. Working collaboratively, we can implement these strategies to achieve a much higher degree of alumni engagement.

The data that I collected could be valuable in addressing similar problems in other organizations. It was important to keep an open mind as I went through the information gathering process. And while the literature on the topic was very informative, other activities were equally enlightening. Focus groups of alumni were helpful because it was direct input from the target audience. They were open and honest about what they would like to be involved in and how they wanted the College to communicate with them.

Interviewing subject matter experts in alumni relations was also extremely informative. I was pleasantly surprised at how much time they were willing to spend to
share their successes, failures, and advice with a total stranger. Similar to my website work, it was useful to discover what other institutions are doing to engage their graduates.

Once the task force is assembled and administrators have been encouraged to include alumni in existing and future events and initiatives, it will be important for Delaware Tech leaders to continue to explore creative ways to keep alumni engaged. Social media is just one example of a communication method that is constantly changing. It will be vital to keep a dialogue going with students, staff, faculty, and alumni about what will keep them involved with the College.
Chapter 6

REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

When I began taking classes in the Ed.D. program at the University of Delaware, I was the director of communication and planning at Delaware Tech’s Owens Campus in Georgetown. I was responsible for marketing and public relations at the campus, as well as events. I also served on the College-wide Marketing and PR Team. Within my first few classes, I was pleasantly surprised that my coursework was extremely relevant to my work. Initially, I had feared that it would not be because I was not an educator or administrator. It was relevant because I was learning more about how to collect data and use it to make decisions. I was also discovering how scholarly literature should be used to inform decisions.

One challenge early in my investigation was that access to scholarly articles was limited because my problem was very specific and was an issue that had not been examined or written about much. Focusing on alumni engagement was new to most community colleges. I learned, however, that literature did not have to be specific to community college in order to provide valuable information. Articles about alumni relations at other types of institutions such as four-year colleges, high schools, and even other types of organizations could relate to my problem.
Another valuable lesson that I learned was that I should use a variety of sources of information in order to make decisions. In order to find answers to my problem, I was able to gather both quantitative and qualitative data that informed my recommendation of specific strategies. It also gives them credibility. I feel confident about my recommendations because I can back them up with scholarly literature and data.

The more I read about the problem and the more information I elicited from students, alumni, and subject matter experts, I realized that there were not easy solutions. But I also learned that people wanted to be involved with the College; they just had never been asked. Student surveys also revealed that there is a wide range of activities and events that interested current students. Finally, literature supports the assertion that students who are involved are more likely to stay connected as alumni.

I was pleasantly surprised at the level of focus group participation, which further reinforced the notion that they will show up for faculty they feel connected to. Everyone who came had been asked to participate by a faculty member or a counselor. I was also surprised at the diversity in majors and ages of participants. Even people who graduated decades ago felt a connection to the College. Additionally, by the time I had hosted them in all three counties, I felt a great deal of responsibility to make meaningful changes because I had raised their expectations by asking what they wanted to be involved in and how they wanted the College to communicate with them.

When I began the Ed.D. program, I was singularly focused on how my classes related to my work at a community college. However, I found myself learning a lot about
other types of institutions by interacting and collaborating with classmates who worked in private and public k-12 systems, as well as faculty and staff at the University of Delaware. Their different perspectives on course material gave me a much wider view of the issues related to education and leadership.

I also enjoyed discussing issues related to course material and the ELP with my colleagues at Delaware Tech who were currently enrolled in the program or had already competed the Ed.D. at the University. The classes provided us with common language and approaches to decision making. I feel like our coursework inspired us to question policies and procedures and to solve problems by collecting data and considering a broader perspective.

Additionally, I was overwhelmed by the support of colleagues at Delaware Tech throughout my work on this project. They helped me in a variety of ways that included recruiting alumni for focus groups, providing technical support that allowed me to administer student surveys, providing institutional data, and implementing strategies.

The relationships that I have made within my institution and with those outside Delaware Tech will be important as I continue my career in education. The collaborations I experienced throughout this process have reinforced the importance of partnerships in facing challenges and making decisions. Although my coursework is concluded, I will continue to maintain these extremely valuable partnerships.

I am a different leader today because of this program. I have grown in many ways, and I feel it at work every day. I am better at managing resources to achieve
results. I work collaboratively with teams using listening skills and encouraging constructive dialogue that respects everyone’s expertise and input. I work hard to engage, motivate and support others while we work toward our collective goals, but I also help my colleagues achieve their personal goals. In addition, this program has made me more self-aware: I recognize my strengths and weaknesses, which makes me value teamwork even more than I previously did. Finally, I am better at making decisions informed by a variety of resources. I will always be extremely grateful for this opportunity to grow and develop as a leader.
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Appendix A
SYNTHESIS OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Introduction

Alumni engagement is an area that community colleges have historically neglected, but in an era of reduced state and community resources, it has become a new priority for many institutions across the nation. Since Delaware Technical Community College opened its doors over five decades ago, over 50,000 people have graduated from the institution. There are currently 15,000 students enrolled at campuses statewide, and since 97% of those students are Delawareans, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who could be engaged to become involved with the College once they graduate.

There are significant challenges associated with establishing ongoing relationships with community college students, however. The early community college student experience can be described as “transactional” or “nomadic,” and administrators need to learn how to transform the former nomads into alumni “settlers” who will stay connected with and supportive of the institution once they finish their academic program (Starace, 2012).
Some graduates immediately get jobs in their fields, and others take advantage of the College’s Connected Degree program and enter other higher education institutions as juniors to complete a bachelor’s degree. Some do both.

Delaware Technical Community College could benefit significantly from increased alumni engagement. Graduates could serve as role models and mentors for students and inspire them to complete their degrees. They could provide internship and networking opportunities. They could volunteer at events and activities that raise funds and project a positive image in the community. And they can act as ambassadors in the community promoting Delaware Tech as a high quality education choice.

Delaware Tech’s low graduation rate is similar to most community colleges nationwide, which is the result of the many unique challenges faced by community college students. If alumni were more engaged with the College, it could give students additional support and inspiration to complete their degrees. But how can we effectively engage them?

Community Colleges vs. Four-year Institutions

What makes community college alumni engagement different from the efforts of four-year higher education institutions? According to Starace (2012) the open-access admission practice of community colleges does not lend itself to the four-year institution’s student experience that has a specific beginning with admission and ending at graduation. The community college student experience can extend over a lifetime and
include transferring credits to another institution, completing courses for career advancement, and enrolling in non-credit courses.

Community colleges are in a precarious position in the current funding environment. (Hall, 2016) They have not developed the same fundraising capacity as four-year schools. “On the average, four-year institutions are able to leverage donations, grants, and investment returns at more than 100 times that of community colleges (Kreisel & Patterson, 2013).

Some characteristics of the four-year settlement advancement model can be effective for community colleges (Starace, 2012). These can include the president serving as the chief fundraiser. It can include recruiting alumni as volunteers for events. However, she recommends constructing a new model that is reflective of the community college student experience.

Literature reveals that, as with other areas of advancement, most community colleges have made minimal investments in staffing and resources to support alumni relations programs (Paradise & Heaton, 2013). Many community college advancement professionals cite the lack of institutional investment as one of the greatest factors driving low-level involvement (Starace, 2012).

Skari and Ullman (2012) assert that community colleges have long been operating under the assumption that they should not waste time and resources reaching out to their alumni in hopes of financial or other types of support. They state that community colleges need a leader who incorporates alumni relations into the business of the college.
This commitment is demonstrated by the leader attending alumni events and speaking publicly about the pride and value that comes from being an alum. They also stress the importance of investing staff and resources in alumni relations.

Lippincott (2011) agrees. He asserts that in order for an institution to get a return on investment, it must invest in the effort with adequate staffing, infrastructure, and financing. He notes that if alumni are the “foster children,” then their alma mater should be the “nourishing mother.”

The Value of Community College Alumni Engagement

A lot of research that has been conducted on the topic of alumni is focused on attracting them as donors. There are advocates, however, who point out additional benefits of alumni engagement. Their value extends well beyond financial contributions. “They are advisors, advocates, and allies in support of institutional mission highly motivated not only by loyalty, but also by a vested interest in seeing the equity of their diplomas over time” (Lippincott, 2011).

Community colleges have only recently begun making alumni engagement a priority. According to a Columbus State Community College report, the benefits of community college alumni engagement include: enhanced visibility and participation on campus; alumni serving as speakers in classrooms or at conferences; increased networking opportunities for current students; word-of-mouth promotion of the college’s programs that could increase enrollment; and access to potential volunteers and mentors (Team Mauritius, 2012).
An institution’s alumni base can be a valuable source of support that if utilized properly can provide a wealth of opportunities for a college (Vanderbout, 2010). Alumni already know and understand what makes the institution special. Once they understand what the organization needs, they can provide support in a variety of ways, such as recruiting students, participating in events on campus, mentoring students, wearing school-branded products, and even seeking additional education themselves.

Mcalexander (2001) also asserts that loyal alumni can be a valuable asset for institutions because they can provide personal recommendations that can help build enrollment, offer donations, participate in events, wear college clothing, and invest in additional education.

Alumni can also be important to the image of an institution, as well as its growth and success. Alumni communicate this through distinction in their careers. When they speak in classes, mentor students, hire graduates, and refer students, they are exhibiting the quality of the education that they received (Vanderbout, 2010).

In recent years some community colleges have replicated the alumni engagement model of four-year institutions by appointing alumni to advisory boards and campus committees, as well as recruiting them as volunteers, ambassadors, and donors (Starace, 2012).

John Lippincott, former president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, asserts that graduates not only serve as the “poster children” for the quality of an institution’s educational experience, but also act as an active and extensive sales force.
He also points out that they can act as advocates with legislative bodies, regulatory agencies, community organizations, media outlets, and other constituencies (Lippincott, 2011).

Another factor to consider is that the great majority of community college students live and work in the community where they studied. This gives this alumni population great potential to become engaged as advocates and volunteers, as well as financial supporters (Paradise & Heaton, 2013).

One issue that can present challenges for community colleges is defining who are considered to be alumni. According to Starace (2012), some community college advancement professionals suggest that the term “alumni” should be renamed or refined to be reflective and inclusive. It shouldn’t just be those that graduated with a degree. Some institutions have expanded the definition of alumni to include students who completed 45 or more credits, while others have begun to consider graduates of non-credit training programs.

Starace (2012) asserts that “how this group of students is named and defined will have a direct impact on the institution’s engagement and fundraising efforts.” If the definition is expanded, the population of alumni is increased.

With a lack of resources, however, how do community colleges begin to build an enhanced alumni engagement program? Who should be targeted? Research by Vanderbout (2010) indicates that being geographically located close to campus makes it easier and more attractive for alumni to become involved. Alumni also indicated that
their stage of life had an impact on involvement. Raising young children or attending graduate school were examples of reasons not to volunteer, for example.

Vanderbout (2010) also found that transformational experience was a factor. Faculty and staff can identify students who felt transformed by their educational experience. Some did not realize it until later, but they now attribute much of their success to their time on campus. They believe that the institution provided their foundation for later success, building their confidence and making them more than they thought they could be.

Some research recommends targeting young alumni as the key to success – that they represent the “game changers” in the alumni relations and development equation. Wampler (2013) asserts that “colleges and universities who can cultivate, engage, and steward young alumni well now are those who will be rising to the top in the next 10 to 25 years – as these alumni become the central benefactors and leaders of their institutions.”

Current Students

Much of the literature on alumni engagement stresses that the key to success is treating current students as future alumni. This begins with their first year impressions of the institution. Attrition for most institutions is most frequent during the first year of college, and nearly all “leavers” do so before the beginning of the second year (Specter, 2012).
Garroway (2011) asserts that a first-year introductory course helps students with learning and socialization strategies. These courses, along with regular academic advising and tutoring, can help students gain confidence and believe in their ability to succeed academically. They also help them integrate socially, which gives them a much better college experience. It is extremely difficult to create satisfied alumni out of unsatisfied students (Lippincott, 2011).

New student transition programs are another example of a first impression that can be important to student’s view of the institution. They communicate expectations and introduce students to the campus through shared activities and rituals. Specter (2012) stresses the importance of fostering connections early and often between students and alumni by involving them in new student orientation.

Relationships with peers, faculty, and staff are another important factor in a student’s lasting impression of an institution. During the undergraduate experience, relationships appear to play a role in both the academic and extracurricular experience (Vanderbout, 2010). Those students who have maintained meaningful relationships feel more connected to the institution.

Faculty relationships seem to be especially important. Focus group members in Vanderbout’s research shared stories about the impact faculty had on turning their life around. They appreciated faculty members taking time to be interested in and talk to them. These relationships appeared to be the glue that kept alumni connected to the institution (Vanderbout, 2010).
Mcalexander (2001) stresses that an important component of institutional relationships are the connections that exist between the institution’s representatives or employees and customers. Customers view employees as tangible representatives of the organization, and interactions with them lead to important assessments and impressions of the institution. The interactions can range from an incidental exchange with a librarian to more frequent and familiar interactions that can exist in a classroom between students and faculty. Due to the fact that for many alumni, the strongest connection to the institution is with the faculty, failing to involve faculty in alumni engagement efforts will hinder chances for success (Lippincott, 2011).

Literature strongly suggests that higher levels of student engagement leads to higher levels of alumni engagement (Hall, 2016). In addition to relationships, experiences are an important part of a student’s feelings about an institution.

Goldsberry (2007) examined the impact of collegiate engagement experiences in community service and found that civic involvement during the undergraduate years led to civic involvement post-graduation. She concluded that if admissions and development staff reinforce the value and importance of engaging in civic activities in the campus environment, it can lead to involvement with the institution or to give back as alumni. Student affairs professionals and faculty can offer opportunities for these experiences through classroom assignments, academic clubs, and service learning semesters.

The time students spend at their undergraduate institution shapes their perceptions and experience for years following their time on campus (Vanderbout, 2010). Graduates
who had rewarding experiences and believed the school contributed to their success feel more connected to their alma mater, become more engaged, and contribute financially when able to do so. Many administrators focus on the importance of student experiences as part of making it to graduation when they should be focused on retaining them for life.

The importance of experience to loyalty behavior suggests that colleges and universities should allocate resources toward student life activities. However, McAlexander (2001) stresses that fun is not the only dimension of experience that has an impact on loyalty. Alumni find value in reflecting on academic mountains they have climbed. Therefore, efforts to make the educational experience less arduous could be counterproductive to alumni engagement.

Community colleges can create student experiences that encourage involvement once they graduate (Skari & Ullman, 2012). Research reveals that one of the most effective socialization strategies is to enlist students in fundraising. When students take part in fundraising, they get a better understanding of the importance of raising money to support the institution and its students. It increases the potential for them to become donors and to form a lifelong connection to the school.

Maynard (2011) conducted research that identified a strong relationship between undergraduate community service and community involvement by alumni. The results hold promise for the long-term value of engaging students in community service activities to promote civic awareness, active citizenship, and enduring community involvement of alumni. They also point to the fact that what students experience has an
impact on their alumni behavior. Community colleges could benefit by keeping alumni involved in community service projects once they graduate. Those projects could be aimed at benefitting current students or others in the surrounding community.

Wampler (2013) stresses that colleges and universities are starting to work more strategically to educate students about what’s awaiting them once they are alumni. They communicate with current students that their experience with the college will change upon graduation, but they can maintain a lifelong connection with the institution. His research asserts that many institutions have significant student outreach programs, but then they do little to bridge the experience into the alumni years.

**Engagement Opportunities**

Four-year institutions have historically engaged alumni through events such as class reunions and athletic events, as well as fundraising campaigns. Hall (2016) asserts that fundraising practices should be examined uniquely since it’s possible that solicitations purely for funds may cause alumni to disengage. Instead, if alumni are invited to events, they may become involved and become donors later. When alumni return to campus, feelings of nostalgia can trigger meaningful connections – especially when there is an affinity for a particular group, academic program, or other activity.

Skari and Ullman (2012) assert that alumni should be invited to all kinds of events – not just alumni events. Attending events at their alma mater strengthens their ties to the institution and its programs. An example of this is “Breakfast with Bobby” at Virginia Western Community College. Alumni are invited to spend time with the college
president, local industry leaders, faculty, and administrators at different locations throughout the community. One was held at a local hospital, where alumni were also able to mingle with hospital administrators. Another took place in a nursing home, where the CEO later donated money to create a new nursing scholarship,

Alumni want the “ask” for things outside of money donations (Team Mauritius, 2012). They want to be invited to attend events. They want to be invited to volunteer at events. Some might want opportunities to promote their business or organization at events. In its Alumni Engagement Summary Report, Columbus State Community College also recommends using events related to their upcoming 50th anniversary to reach out to alumni.

In addition to events, institutions use traditions to engage alumni. According to Specter (2012), “Traditions and their lore can dictate a list of must-do-before-graduation activities that unite generations of alumni.” She provides the example of Carnegie Mellon’s unofficial campus billboard, the Fence, which was recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the most painted object in the world. Any student or group can paint the fence, but it must be done between midnight and sunrise, in its entirety, using only paintbrushes. Groups guard the Fence around the clock if they don’t want anyone to paint over their work.

Specter (2012) points to other examples of colleges using traditions to promote student and ultimately alumni engagement. Georgetown University students gather outside on Halloween night to watch The Exorcist, which was partially filmed on
campus. After the movie, students gather at a local cemetery for the “Healy Howl,” and they howl at the moon.

Every spring at Rollins College, the president chooses a day to cancel classes and notifies students by putting a huge fox on the main lawn. Students board buses to go to the beach or Universal Studios for the day and return to a community picnic on campus with faculty and staff.

A college’s traditions can act as a tangible representation of its mission (Specter, 2012). The University of Delaware’s mission is service oriented, so linking traditions to service could support curriculum and outreach objectives. Delaware Tech’s mission stresses accessibility, affordability, and the need to contribute to the economic vitality of the state. Traditions can be linked to these parts of the mission and emphasize the values of the institution. Examples that already exist are the 5k races at each campus that support student scholarships.

Specter (2012) stresses that tradition-building must be a shared responsibility among university stakeholders. She asserts that university departments and affiliated organizations should work together to create relevant programming for orientation and first-year experience events, festivals, gatherings, and other traditions.

In addition to events and traditions, there are other opportunities to engage alumni in meaningful ways. Mcalexander (2001) recommends including alumni in tutoring and mentoring programs, as well as rituals that might take place at the beginning, middle, or end of a semester. He asserts that alumni respond well to messages and programs that
convey the message that alumni opinions are valued. He states that people maintain relationships in which they feel they are treated fairly and that the resources they provide are reciprocated.

Team Mauritius (2012) recommends establishing a cross-department steering committee to focus collaboratively on alumni engagement. They also state that alumni connections should grow within academic departments with support from that steering committee.

Communication

Common strategies for communicating with alumni include magazines, e-newsletters, annual reports, and social media (Skari & Ullman, 2012). Research suggests that increased frequency of communication with alumni results in a greater likelihood that they will contribute financially to the institution. It also serves to keep them updated about campus initiatives and activities, providing them with opportunities to engage.

Wampler (2013) points out that a major problem in communicating with alumni is that typically the first contact a young graduate has with the institution is a gift solicitation sometimes just a month or two after commencement. This tells them that their new relationship with their alma mater is all about money. It also doesn’t make sense that a 22 year old graduate would receive the same solicitation as older, more established alumni.

Hall (2016) supports this viewpoint. She asserts that alumni who want to stay connected with the institution will typically welcome frequent communication. If the
communication always contains a gift solicitation, however, positive feelings about the institution may wane, and even turn to resentment.

In addition, for many institutions, their first opportunity they take to truly engage alumni is a five-year reunion (Wampler, 2013). After five years, young alumni have already established patterns of behavior in their personal and professional lives. If they have not been approached to maintain relationships with their alma mater soon after graduation, they move on. Young alumni need to be communicated with about engagement opportunities as students and then soon after graduation.

This can be challenging, however, as addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses change over time. Community colleges must develop improved systems to update, store, and access important alumni information (Skari & Ullman, 2012). The type of system will depend on the culture of the institution, available resources, and staffing levels for alumni relations.

Columbus State Community College reports that their Development Foundation holds a list of more than 43,000 alumni and nearly 10,000 emails that they had updated by a marketing service (Team Mauritius, 2012). The College also possesses a larger list with raw data that they state could be scrubbed for approximately $85,000.

A survey by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) found that many community colleges do not have updated contact information for a large number of their alumni. Responding institutions tracked mailing addresses for 48 percent and email addresses for 12 percent of their alumni population on average (CASE, 2013).
The task of capturing, maintaining, and analyzing information is a tremendous task that requires resources and updated database technology (Specter, 2012). The University of Delaware uses a software package for philanthropic prospecting and record keeping and could expand use of that software to track alumni data. Many community colleges have simply not dedicated enough staff and resources to effectively manage alumni tracking.

Lippincott (2011) asserts that alumni engagement requires “regular, targeted, and timely information in ways that suit their interests and match their communication preferences, including social media platforms.” He stresses that communication that is focused solely on fundraising is worse than no communication at all.

Specter (2012) recommends continuing to provide electronic library access, e-learning opportunities, affinity chat rooms, and lifetime university email addresses. All of these examples use technology effectively to maintain connectivity.

Conclusions

It’s clear that community colleges can benefit from increased alumni engagement in multiple ways. First, because community college alumni usually live in the same community as their alma mater, they can be advocates and ambassadors. They can recommend the College as a high quality, low cost education. They can offer internships and hire graduates. They can also serve on advisory boards and committees and represent examples of success for current students.
Alumni can also play a vital role in volunteering for events and other activities that could increase success rates for students. They can act as tutors and mentors. They can speak in classrooms and at events like new student orientation. They can help staff department displays and share their experience with prospective students at open houses. The community college experience presents challenges, and students benefit by talking with individuals who persevered through those challenges and succeeded.

Finally, engaged alumni are more likely to become donors (Skari & Ullman, 2012). If alumni maintain meaningful connections with the institution, they are more willing to donate funds when they are financially able to do so. In a time of scarce resources, community colleges have to create robust alumni engagement programs.

Starace (2012) recognizes the college president as the one with primary responsibility for creating an institutional culture and providing resources for an alumni relations infrastructure. She recommends that the president ask the following questions: What is the role of alumni at our institution – volunteer, ambassador, advocate, and/or philanthropist? What is our expected return on investment based on those roles? How much of a loss will we be willing to take before we see a return on investment? What will success look like? How can we direct institutional resources to support alumni engagement efforts?

It’s important to realize the differences between four-year institutions and community colleges. While there are some best practices that can be imitated, there is a need for community colleges to implement programs that attract alumni in unique ways.
that don’t necessarily involve football games or class reunions. Alumni should be engaged to increase the success of students who face challenges that students at four-year institutions don’t typically face such as childcare, transportation, and full-time employment.

In order to be successful at alumni engagement, community college students must be treated as future alumni from the minute they walk into new student orientation. The institution should get students involved in fundraising efforts and community service projects and communicate with current students about their future role as alumni.

Community colleges should focus attention on experiences and traditions in order to make students feel more connected to the institution. Alumni should be afforded opportunities to stay involved with certain activities once they graduate in order to maintain valuable, meaningful connections.

Finally, community colleges must use technology to communicate with alumni effectively. Social media platforms offer opportunities to communicate. However, investing in tracking software to be able to target alumni with specific messaging is necessary. If alumni engagement increases and benefits the college and its students, the result will be a significant return on investment.


Lippincott, J., Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2011). *President’s*


Appendix B

PROGRAM EVALUATION: DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI EVENTS

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation was to gather information about the effectiveness of Delaware Technical Community College’s Distinguished Alumni Celebrations to inspire students to continue pursuing their academic goals. Although these celebrations have traditionally been hosted in the evening with sparse attendance, the events at the Jack F. Owens Campus in Georgetown in January 2017 and September 2017 were changed to luncheons that were free for students, faculty, and staff to attend.

The process question for this evaluation was “To what degree do students feel that the Distinguished Alumni Celebrations inspire them to persevere and continue to work toward their academic goals?” The outcome question was “What percentage of students who attended the celebrations in Georgetown had registered for the next semester of classes, and what is the relationship between attendance at celebration events and registering the following semester?”

The sample for this evaluation consisted of the 15 students who attended the Distinguished Alumni Celebration in January and the six students who attended the event in September at the College’s Owens Campus in Georgetown. Students were asked to complete an anonymous and optional survey. The process question was measured by six
Likert Scale statements about the students’ perceptions of how inspiring and educational the event was to them (See Appendix C).

Two additional open-ended questions collected their input about the benefits of the current program in their own words, as well as their suggestions for different programs that could involve alumni inspiring and supporting students. This information, while not intended to answer the process or outcome question, could prove to be useful to the institution in implementing other programs.

In order to answer the outcome question, I asked students at the end of the survey if they had registered for the next semester of classes.

The results of the Likert Scale portion of the survey strongly suggest that students feel that they learned about options for their future careers and that they were inspired by the stories of the honorees. They also strongly agreed or agreed that they learned valuable information about their future professions and that the event helped them picture their future success. They also agreed that the event made them want to persevere to graduation.

The short answer responses were coded, and the most frequent answer regarding benefits and takeaways from the event focused on the fact that the event made them want to work hard and never give up. The second question asked if they had ideas about other events that could highlight successful alumni, and 61.5% asked for additional opportunities similar to the Distinguished Alumni Celebration.

Finally, in response to the question of whether or not they had registered for the next semester of classes, 100% replied no. This highlighted a flaw in the question
because there was still plenty of time for them to register, and just because they hadn’t registered yet doesn’t mean that they didn’t intend to do so in the coming months.

**Description of the Program**

At Delaware Tech, the retention rate for first-time, full-time degree seeking students was 61% from fall 2014 to fall 2015. The retention rate for first-time, part-time degree seeking students was far worse at 37%. Graduation rates for first-time, full-time students is 14.2%. While this is not uncommon for community colleges, it is still unacceptable. Community college presents challenges that are different from residential four-year institutions. Many students face obstacles related to finances, jobs, childcare, and transportation. In response to these challenges and others, the College continually implements efforts to support student success including initiatives like tutoring, learning communities, mandatory advisement, and developmental courses.

The Distinguished Alumni Celebrations on each campus are aimed at providing several outcomes. Those include:

- Faculty and staff feeling pride in what they’re helping students accomplish
- Alumni re-engaging with the institution and becoming involved with other College activities
- The College improving its reputation by communicating the quality of the education and the success of graduates through media coverage of the event
- Students feeling inspired to persevere to graduation
This evaluation focused on students and their inspiration to continue in their program after attending the Distinguished Alumni Celebration and hearing from a very successful graduate in their academic major. When alumni receive their award, they are introduced by the person who nominated them, and then they tell their stories. Their speeches usually include information about the obstacles they overcame, the support they received from faculty and staff at the College, and how their Delaware Tech degree helped them to enter their field and excel.

In January 2017, the celebration at the Jack F. Owens Campus was changed for the first time from an evening event that charged $25 a ticket for dinner to a lunchtime event that was free for anyone who wanted to attend. As a result, student attendance grew dramatically to include 15 students from the Veterinary Tech and Environmental Engineering Technology programs – the same two programs the honorees graduated from. In September, both honorees were graduates of the Business program, and there were only six students in attendance.

The purpose of this evaluation was to investigate if attending the celebration has a positive impact on students’ determination to continue and succeed in their programs.

Evaluation Questions

1. Process Question: To what degree do students feel that the Distinguished Alumni Celebrations inspire them to persevere and continue to work toward their academic goals?
2. Outcome Question: What percentage of students who attended the celebrations in Georgetown registered for their next semester of classes, and what is the relationship between attendance at celebration events and registering the following semester?

The process question explored whether students felt inspired by being exposed to the stories of successful alumni in their fields of study, while the outcome question was intended to explore whether they took action to continue in their programs.

Design and Methodology

Sample

The sample for this evaluation was the 15 students who attended the Distinguished Alumni Celebration in January and the six students who attended the September event at the College’s Owens Campus in Georgetown. Of the two alumni being honored in January, one was a veterinary technology major who became the ophthalmology nursing supervisor at the Veterinary Specialty Center of Delaware (VSCD) in New Castle, and the other was the retired department chair of the Owens Environmental Engineering program. All of the students who attended were majoring in one of these fields. Twelve were veterinary tech majors, and three were environmental engineering majors.

In September, both honorees were graduates of the College’s business program. The six students who attended were students in different programs, including nursing, business, and education.

Instrument
Students were asked to complete an anonymous and optional survey. The process question was measured by six Likert Scale statements about the students’ perceptions of how inspiring and educational the event was to them (See Appendix B). The questions were informed by scholarly literature on alumni engagement. The Likert Scale only gave four choices of responses – strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. This “forced choice” method removed the answer of “undecided” or “neutral” so that respondents had to choose one of the four options.

Two additional open-ended questions collected their input about the benefits of the current program in their own words, as well as their suggestions for different programs that could involve alumni inspiring and supporting students. This information, while not intended to answer the process or outcome question, could prove to be useful to the institution in implementing other programs.

In order to answer the outcome question, I asked students at the end of the survey if they had registered for the next semester of classes.

Data Collection

I had originally planned to administer a Qualtrics survey through the students’ College email accounts, but their instructors thought that the response rate would improve if they handed out a paper survey. I asked the instructors to read a message thanking the students in advance for participating, explaining how important it is that they provide feedback, and inviting them to attend the next Distinguished Alumni Celebration. I also asked instructors to stress that the survey was anonymous and that filling it out was optional.
Data Analysis

I calculated the frequency of responses and the percentages for each Likert Scale question. These were recorded on a spreadsheet created in Excel.

The responses to the two open-ended questions were recorded onto one single spreadsheet organized under each question. The answers were then coded into categories with the results presented in a table. Finally, the percentage of students who registered for the next semester of classes was calculated.

Findings

The responses to the Likert Scale questions regarding the level of inspiration and education the event provided were all “agree” or “strongly agree” with regard to the statements. Table 1 provides the percentages of responses as well as the frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I learned about additional options for my future by listening to the honorees’ remarks.</td>
<td>12 92%</td>
<td>1 8%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I learned about future educational opportunities from the alumni speaker in my chosen field.</td>
<td>8 62%</td>
<td>5 38%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I learned valuable information about my future profession by listening to the stories of the alumni speakers.</td>
<td>8 62%</td>
<td>5 38%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I gained inspiration from their stories.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The experiences they shared helped me to picture my future success in my chosen field.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Attending this event made me want to persevere and graduate despite the obstacles I face.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table illustrates, there were no responses of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to any of the statements regarding the event. The highest percentage of “strongly agree” answers were in response to statements about learning additional options for the future, gaining inspiration from the stories of the alumni, and making them want to persevere to graduation despite the obstacles they face. The other statement that also had a high rate of “strongly agree” was in response to students being able to picture themselves in the field. The answers to the short answer questions were coded and are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

**Benefits and Takeaways from the Distinguished Alumni Celebration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learned to work hard, and never give up</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was valuable to hear from someone who has faced obstacles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me gain confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed an interest in one of the honorees’ specialty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of the students reported that they learned that hard work and never giving up can lead to career success. Four students appreciated the opportunity to hear from someone who has faced the same obstacles that they have as a community college student. Finally, one student reported gaining confidence, while another enjoyed learning about the specialty of one of the alumni honorees.

In response to the second question about what students would suggest for programs that could involve highlighting alumni, 61.5% asked for the creation of other experiences like the Distinguished Alumni Celebration as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions for Programs to Highlight Alumni</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create additional experiences like this</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have alumni help us connect with jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight responses encouraged the College to create additional experiences for students to hear directly from alumni. One student responded that alumni should help students connect with jobs. Four did not respond to the question.

Finally, the students were asked if they had registered for the next semester of classes, and 100% of them responded no, with one student adding “not yet.”

One challenge I faced is that the return rate was not good for the January event, possibly due to the fact that it was the end of the semester, and the event had happened
three months prior to the survey. An additional challenge was that not registering for the
next semester could be the result of many factors unrelated to inspiration or education
and that registration can happen as late as the beginning of the next semester.

Response rate was 100% for the September event, probably due to the fact that
students were asked to complete the surveys immediately following the celebration.
However, it could have yielded more significant results if there had been more students in
attendance.

Conclusions

Overall analysis of the surveys reveals that students were inspired by the
Distinguished Alumni Celebration and that they learned valuable career information from
listening to the alumni speakers. There was a high degree of consistency in their
responses to the six statements on the survey with everyone either agreeing or strongly
agreeing. The results strongly suggest that the event is beneficial for students.

Students clearly feel that the event inspired them to work hard and never give up.
Others gained confidence from listening to the speaker, and one reported developing an
interest in the specialty of the speaker. This illustrates the value of exposure to the event
for the College’s current students. As stated earlier, the College faces challenges related
to retention and graduation rates, so if this event can be used to inspire and further
educate current students, it could be an important tool in promoting student success.
Students clearly indicated that they would like to see additional events to connect with alumni and hear their stories. These celebrations are held annually on the Georgetown Campus and every other year at the College’s other campuses.

As reported previously, every student responded “no” to the question asking them if they had registered for the next semester. In retrospect, the question was flawed because they still had plenty of time to register. Just because they hadn’t registered by the time they took the survey did not necessarily mean that they would not. In future surveys students should be asked if they plan on registering for classes in the next semester. So the outcome question was not answered effectively by this evaluation. Students did report being inspired to continue, which might indicate their intention to register, but it was not confirmed.

Recommendations for Action

Keep the Distinguished Alumni Celebration at the Owens Campus as a free luncheon to allow students to attend and gain inspiration – especially those students who are studying in the field of the honorees. The results of the evaluation clearly indicate that students were inspired by the stories of the alumni. They also reported wanting to persevere and graduate despite obstacles they face. Finally, they reported learning valuable information about their future profession.

Encourage those who host Distinguished Alumni Celebrations at the other campus locations to host their event annually as a free luncheon open to all students. Although these events have followed the same format for many years, if students on all Delaware
Tech campuses have the opportunity to attend and be inspired by successful alumni, the College should support this change.

Create a college-wide Alumni Engagement Task Force to create a plan for additional opportunities for students to connect with and be inspired by alumni. The results of the survey strongly suggest that students are positively impacted by opportunities to hear from successful alumni and to connect with them. The group could explore how alumni can be involved in current events, as well as create new initiatives that allow alumni to connect with and inspire students to persevere. The result of the Task Force’s efforts should be a comprehensive plan that can be implemented on campuses statewide.

Finally, create a mechanism to track the percentage of students who attended the Distinguished Alumni Celebration who register for classes the following semester. Even though it is free event, students have to email their intention to attend and check in when they arrive at the luncheon. As stated earlier, students have until the first week of classes to register, and asking them months ahead of the next semester does not provide a final answer. So when the following semester starts, the College should track how many of them are continuing in their academic program.
Figure 1 Logic Model for Distinguished Alumni Celebrations

Appendix A

Logic Model: Distinguished Alumni Celebrations at Delaware Tech

**Inputs**
- Staff time
- Support staff time
- Funding
- Alumni Board members as volunteers
- Printing equipment and supplies
- Caterer
- Linens and Centerpieces
- Plaques

**Activities**
- Requests for nominations and nomination forms are posted on employee and student portal
- Each campus committee reviews the nominations and selects one or two honorees
- Honorees are contacted and dates are confirmed
- Head shots are taken, and biographies are written for the website, program, and press release
- The event is publicized using press releases and mass emails
- News and events feature stories about the Distinguished Alumni Awards are posted to the Delaware Teacher website
- Distinguished alumni are featured in the Delaware Tech Magazine, which is distributed statewide
- Post-event press releases are sent to newspapers statewide

**Activity**
- Staff and faculty celebrate the success of former students

**Activities**
- Celebrations are held where each honoree is presented with a plaque. Each honoree gives a speech about his or her Delaware Tech experience and life story in front of family, friends, students, staff, and faculty
- Students see examples of graduates who persevered and succeeded
- A message is communicated about the success of Delaware Tech graduates

**Outcomes**
- Faculty and staff feel pride in what they’re helping students accomplish
- Alumni are re-engaged with the institution and become involved with other College activities
- Students feel inspired to persevere to graduation
- The College’s reputation is improved by communication supporting the quality of the education and the success of graduates
**Figure 2 Distinguished Alumni Survey Process and Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Variables/Instrument</th>
<th>Data Collection Procedures</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong>: To what degree do students feel that the Distinguished Alumni Celebration inspires them to persevere and continue to work toward their academic goals?</td>
<td>At Delaware Tech, the retention rate for first-time, full-time degree seeking students was 61% from fall 2014 to fall 2015. The retention rate for first-time, part-time degree seeking students was far worse at 37%. This evaluation was designed to obtain information about whether bringing successful alumni on campus has an impact on inspiration.</td>
<td>The sample included 21 students who attended the Distinguished Alumni Celebration at the College’s campus in Georgetown.</td>
<td>A survey was designed to collect information regarding students' perceptions about inspiration and education they experienced as a result of attending the event.</td>
<td>Surveys were handed out in class to students that attended the event with direction from the instructors that their participation was anonymous and optional.</td>
<td>The frequency of response and the mean was calculated for each Likert Scale question and recorded on a spreadsheet. The answers to each of the open-ended questions was recorded onto one single spreadsheet grouped by the specific question.</td>
<td>March 20-24: Notified Vet Tech and Engineering instructors that surveys will be administrated to their students. March 27-31: Developed survey. April 3-7: Pilot tested survey. April 10-12: Revised survey. April 20-24: Surveys provided to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome:</strong> What percentage of students who attended the celebration in Georgetown registered for the next semester of classes, and what is the relationship between attendance at celebration events and registering the following semester?</td>
<td>Since retention is a challenge for the College, the survey attempted to reveal how many students had registered for the next semester, which could possibly indicate that they were inspired by and took action due to their exposure to successful alumni.</td>
<td>The sample included 21 students who attended Distinguished Alumni Celebrations at the College’s campus in Georgetown in December and September of 2017.</td>
<td>The instrument was designed to collect students’ perceptions about hearing from successful alumni and the effect it had on their actions to continue to and the status of their registration for the next semester.</td>
<td>Surveys were handed out in class to students that attended the event with direction from the instructors that their participation was anonymous and optional.</td>
<td>The number of students who registered for the next semester of classes was calculated. In addition, their responses about being inspired were also examined as a possible indicator of their intent to register if they had not done so yet.</td>
<td>September 27: Provided surveys to instructors for September event. October 1: Write final evaluation report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey regarding your experience at the Distinguished Alumni Celebration luncheon. Please answer all of the questions. We will use your input to improve the Distinguished Alumni program and to create other initiatives to help students succeed.

1. I learned about additional options for my future by listening to the alumni speakers.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

2. I learned about future educational opportunities from the alumni speakers.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

3. I learned valuable information about my future profession by listening to the stories of the alumni speakers.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

4. I gained inspiration from their stories.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

5. The experiences they shared helped me to picture my future success in my chosen field.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

6. Attending this event made me want to persevere and graduate despite the obstacles I face.
   
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

What are the benefits of the Distinguished Alumni Celebration, and what did you take away from it?
What suggestions do you have for other programs that could involve highlighting successful alumni or connecting them with students?

Have you registered for classes for the next semester?  Yes  No
Appendix C

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

History of Community Colleges and Alumni Relations

Alumni engagement has been commonly neglected at community colleges across the nation for decades. However, in an era of reduced state and community resources, it is becoming a priority for many institutions that are recognizing a major untapped resource— not merely a resource for funding, but one that can help current students succeed, as well as improve the image of the college.

There are many challenges that these institutions face in improving alumni engagement, however. A study by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) revealed some hurdles to overcome. Researchers found that many community college employees working in alumni relations roles had less than two years of experience working in the field. Less than 60 percent of survey respondents maintained a dedicated annual budget for alumni relations. Additionally, many community colleges lacked updated contact information for most of their alumni (CASE, 2014).

Other challenges include the fact that many community college graduates pursue degrees beyond their associate degree and develop their long-term relationships with
those higher education institutions. Some graduates enter the workforce immediately, and if their community college is ineffective in reaching out to them, most lose interest in being involved.

Literature also indicates that the community college experience itself presents challenges. “The early community college student experience can be described as ‘transactional’ or ‘nomadic.’” Institutions need to better understand how to transform these students into “alumni settlers” who will remain involved with the institution once they complete their academic program (Starace, 2012).

Outreach Efforts by Community Colleges

Some two-year institutions are beginning to improve alumni engagement in non-traditional ways. Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) drastically increased their communication with alumni by creating a monthly alumni e-newsletter, specific alumni Facebook and LinkedIn sites, and email blasts from the president when there is news to tell about the College (Budryk, 2013).

At HACC they also made big changes in their previous outreach strategy. According to Maureen Hoepfer, director of alumni relations, “Until a few years ago, HACC primarily had social events to get alumni back on campus, but as the lives of alumni got busier, attendance at such events decreased. Based on alumni feedback the college has focused its outreach efforts on offering alumni meaningful opportunities to return to campus and give back.” They asked alumni to get involved with open houses so they could share their experiences with prospective students. They also established an
alumni ambassador program, which created a network of alumni who agree to help with projects and programs at the institution when they can.

Northampton Community College has a strong alumni engagement program, which is unusual for a two-year institution. Their alumni have been actively acting as ambassadors since 1975. However, their board of directors has strategically changed the focus in recent years to activities that support institutional priorities. For example, alumni attend an annual statewide Community College Lobby Day at the state legislature along with students. They serve on panels for student programs. And they work with the College to raise funds for capital projects (Budryk, 2013).

Alumni who are engaged are also more likely to donate to the college when they are able to. An article entitled *Community College Alumni: Predicting Who Gives* asserts that social exchange theory suggests that connections influence giving (Skari, 2014). Institutions that operationalize social exchange theory through the cultivation of relationships with their alumni create strong connections that make them hold on to positive feelings toward their alma mater. Then they are more likely to donate money or time to support the college.

Skari’s research also pointed out the difference between students that graduated with an associate degree and those who transferred or only took a few courses. Graduates are much more likely to be engaged and donate to the institution. She cited possible reasons for this, such as the “pomp and circumstance” of graduation or the reminder of the degree hanging on the wall.
Doug Ferguson, director of alumni programs at Delaware County Community College, stresses the importance of planning for every purchase and mailing due to lack of financial and personnel resources. This has required changing prior practices and implementing more cost-effective methods. “One of our greatest successes has been to re-engage and communicate with alumni via social media, specifically LinkedIn. This site has helped identify prominent graduates not previously known, increase our career services outreach, and make a strong first impression with current students.” He also stressed that LinkedIn served as a vital tool in updating their email database and reducing return mail counts (Hanrahan, 2016).

Tobi Bruhn, associate vice president of advancement and executive director of the Foundation and Alumni Association at Bucks County Community College (BCCC), also asserts that social media should be used as an important tool to maintain alumni relations and raise funds. Like most community colleges, they have had to be creative with limited resources. Specifically, BCCC has been using free crowdfunding software to ask for the support of alumni for special projects, such as an effort to raise money for a new costume for the school’s mascot (Hanrahan, 2016).

Best Practices

Research conducted by the Luoma Leadership Academy at Minnesota State University reveals five fundamental components of a successful alumni association.

The first component is a clear website that is easy to navigate. Key features of the website should include information on alumni services such as networking opportunities,
library access, lifelong learning programs, transcripts, and bookstore discounts. The website should also include career services information like college job fairs, job openings, and volunteer and mentorship opportunities for alumni. There should also be information on upcoming events, as well as photos from recent events. There should be a link that allows them to give a donation. And finally, there should be a section where graduates can update their contact information and share their personal stories (Blixt, 2010).

The second best practice identified in the report was that community colleges create a newsletter or magazine that would be available in print and online. The publication should highlight new programs, alumni profiles, activities and events, construction, and any other news that could interest alumni.

The third component is hosting alumni networking opportunities, which could include a wide variety of events. Class reunions, social gatherings, ribbon-cuttings, graduations, hall of fame or other celebrations that celebrate alumni, 5k walk/runs, holiday events, and volunteering opportunities should be communicated to alumni in an effort to keep them informed and connected to the college.

The fourth best practice is offering alumni services such as job listings, mentorship opportunities, transcripts, and library and computer access. These services should be consistently communicated in order to remind graduates of the support services that are available to them as alumni of the institution, no matter how long it has been since they were a student at the college.
The final best practice identified in the report is fundraising. As mentioned earlier, some colleges are successful beyond getting donations from their alumni. They actually have alumni who work to help them raise money in the community.

Additional research conducted at Columbus State Community College resulted in recommendations based on best practices (Team Mauritius, 2012). Their recommendations included:

- Creating a central, staffed alumni office
- Establishing a cross-department steering committee to focus on alumni engagement
- Identifying available resources to support initiatives
- Engaging alumni to participate in routine and special events
- Continuing to grow alumni connections within academic departments
- Continuing to pursue social networking applications to connect with alumni
- Increasing the frequency of communication sent to alumni
- Improving the alumni database with updated information
- Using celebrations such as anniversaries to reach out to alumni and engage them

The report also stresses the need for institutions to recognize and supply the necessary resources to support alumni engagement activities. Resources such as professional and clerical personnel, office space, equipment and supplies, promotional materials, software for maintaining alumni records, and funding for events are all key to the success of the recommendations.
Delaware Tech Outreach Efforts

Although Delaware Tech’s first campus opened five decades ago with three other campus locations following soon after, focus on alumni engagement is relatively new for the College. Alumni Association Boards have existed on all campus for years, but they have been unsuccessful at recruiting many graduates to remain involved.

Some information about the institution may be helpful in highlighting the drastic differences associated with a statewide community college and other higher education schools in the state.

The College’s mission is to provide “affordable, open admission, post-secondary education that is relevant and responsive to labor market and community needs. The College offers comprehensive educational opportunities that contribute to the economic vitality of the state, including career, general, developmental, and transfer education; workforce development; and lifelong learning. The College respects its students as individuals and as members of diverse groups and is committed to fostering student success in higher education as a means to economic and personal advancement.”

Although over 50,000 students have graduated from Delaware Tech, alumni involvement has never been a primary focus. However, similar to other community colleges, there is a realization that it’s time to engage those graduates, most of who still live in and are employed in Delaware, which is unlike many four-year institutions where their students return to their home states following graduation. Because 97% of Delaware Tech students reside in Delaware, there is an opportunity for significant engagement.
Figure 3 Delaware Tech Demographics and Data

Delaware Technical Community College

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Fall 2014 to Fall 2015 Retention Rates

| First-time, Full-Time Degree Seeking Retention Rate | 61% |
| First-time, Part-time Degree Seeking Retention Rate | 37% |

Awards - Class of 2016

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<th>Certificate</th>
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Although graduation rates are low compared to four-year institutions, they are actually similar to community colleges across the nation. Community college students frequently have challenges related to finances, transportation, jobs, and family. Additionally, graduation rates are calculated in a three-year window, and many community college students take more time to finish than those three years due to the need to take developmental courses or attend part-time because of work or other responsibilities.
Over 600 organizations and businesses statewide employ Delaware Tech graduates, so outreach efforts could reach beyond alumni to their co-workers. Successful outreach efforts could also have a positive effect on reaching prospective students in their families and friends. This group of individuals is a tremendous resource that should be engaged to help increase success and graduation rates for our current students by acting as role models and mentors.

Current Strategies

Delaware Tech has some initiatives in place that are aimed at engaging alumni. One is the Delaware Tech Magazine, which is produced collectively by marketing and public relations staff at all four campus locations. The magazine contains everything recommended as a best practice previously in this paper – information about alumni success, new academic programs, lifelong learning opportunities, upcoming events, and past events. The magazine is sent out in a mass mailing and is available on the Delaware Tech website.

Although the magazine is an example of positive outreach, there are issues worth considering. Due to a lack of sufficient personnel and financial resources, it is only produced twice a year. Many of the stories, while interesting, can be out of date by the time they are read. And six months between each issue means that the College is not reaching alumni in the frequency that it should.

There are also events aimed at engaging alumni. Each campus has a Distinguished Alumni Celebration that gives awards to one or two graduates in recognition of
excellence and outstanding achievements in their professional careers and in their service to the community. This event provides an opportunity to highlight examples of high achieving graduates to each campus’s faculty and students. Press releases and photos of the honorees are sent to local media. While it’s a very positive event, the result is not significant compared to the number of graduates the College doesn’t engage.

In addition, the College contacts successful graduates each year to speak at each campus’s Donor Luncheon and Scholarship Luncheon. These are opportunities to highlight the success of alumni with those who give generously to the College. Last year the speakers at the Owens Campus Donor Luncheon included a Business graduate who works as a high level sales representative for a large company and a Turf Management graduate who leads a team of groundskeepers at a major league stadium.

As mentioned previously, each campus has an Alumni Association Board. These groups meet every other month on each campus, and a college-wide Alumni Board meets twice a year. These meetings rarely result in the recruitment of additional members and usually include less than eight people. Board members occasionally set up an information table at events like new student orientation, but frequently it is difficult to get people to staff it.

Unfortunately, the College’s website does not make it easy for alumni to find information recommended as best practices. In order to find the alumni page, a visitor has to click on “About” and then on “Giving” and finally on “Alumni.” The page does offer information about obtaining an alumni ID card that allows them access to career services.
and the library, as well as the opportunity to order transcripts. Other than that, however, there is not much information, and there is not an opportunity to update their information or share their stories.

The web page lists the benefits of being active in their alumni association as providing an opportunity to connect with fellow alumni, making an impact by sharing their ideas, and providing internship opportunities for students. It doesn’t include information about ways they can become involved or about upcoming events. The phone numbers on the page connect them with Development offices at each campus instead of to a specific alumni office because those offices don’t exist.

50th Anniversary Celebration

Many community colleges in the United States started around the same time – usually in the sixties and seventies – so there have been numerous 40th, 45th, and 50th anniversary celebrations throughout the country in the past several years. Delaware Tech celebrated its 50th anniversary during the calendar year 2016.

As mentioned in the recommendations by Columbus State Community College, celebrations such as anniversaries present an opportunity to engage alumni. Delaware Tech seized the opportunity with a variety of outreach efforts that targeted the sizeable population of the College’s alumni that live and work in Delaware in an effort to re-connect them with the College by communicating highlights during the institution’s first 50 years. The outreach focused on the accomplishments of graduates, the quality of their education, and historical milestones.
Website

A 50th Anniversary website was created and linked to the Delaware Tech website. The “micro-site” contains a timeline of the College’s history, photographs of the last 50 years, a video about the College, and alumni success stories.

Stories included that of Loretta Kilby, who graduated with an Associate in Nursing Degree at age 44 in 1977, an achievement that helped her support her seven children. Then there’s John Przbylski, who graduated with an Associate in Biotechnology Degree in 2009 and went on to become a physician’s assistant. There are the married Army veterans who graduated from the Commercial Transportation program and are both successful truck drivers today. And finally, there’s Begonia Belasco, an immigrant from Peru, who graduated with an Associate in Architectural Engineering Technology Degree and is now at Catholic University earning dual master’s degrees in sustainable design and architecture.

The site included information and photos of community service projects completed by faculty, staff, and students. Examples include study abroad service in the Dominican Republic, the Polar Bear Plunge, a Bowl-a-thon for the Boys and Girls Club, and work at the Sunday Morning Breakfast Mission. Service projects were completed by student clubs, academic departments, and alumni board members.

The site also provides an opportunity for alumni to update their contact information and share their personal stories, which many did. It was an extremely valuable tool that engaged alumni with photos and information that encouraged them to
share their fond memories. The micro-site had many of the characteristics mentioned previously in best practices.

Events

There were also several events throughout the year to celebrate the 50th anniversary. Alumni were invited to join faculty, students, staff, donors, and elected officials at the campus kickoff celebrations in February. Board members and the president spoke at each celebration, and the 50th anniversary video was shown to all in attendance. The video featured alumni, elected officials, retirees, and other stakeholders speaking about the history and value of Delaware’s only community college.

Alumni were also invited to attend graduation and be recognized. And they were invited along with the community to a 50th anniversary picnic, which offered free dinner from a wide variety of food trucks, as well as family games and entertainment.

Although the 50th anniversary provided an opportunity to reach alumni in a variety of ways, the year is quickly coming to an end. The challenge will be to continue that engagement and expand it to reach more graduates and to get them involved in meaningful ways.

Tracking Alumni

A common problem that plagues community colleges is the lack of updated contact information for their graduates. Delaware Tech is no different. For years the
College’s efforts to reach alumni have been met with a deluge of “return to sender” letters and invitations, as well as undeliverable emails.

Unfortunately, the College does not have the human resources to track alumni that four-year higher education institutions have, and this will remain an issue unless there is affordable technology available to assist in this.

Personnel and Resource Limitations

One final issue regarding the current situation at Delaware Tech with regard to engaging alumni is the economic climate and limited state resources. The College is currently involved in an effort to get legislation passed that to raise property taxes that would allow Delaware Tech to issue bonds. The money would be used to repair the institution’s aging infrastructure, which totals $80 million in deferred maintenance.

It is not a climate that will allow for the creation of new positions solely dedicated to alumni relations. If the College is motivated to pursue increased alumni engagement, it will have to occur with existing personnel, many of whom will be doing that in addition to their current responsibilities.

There are also limited financial resources that can be tapped for alumni engagement efforts. Similar to other community colleges, Delaware Tech will not be able to rely solely on alumni relations staff. The College will have to implement initiatives that are creative and efficient, such as the social media programs mentioned previously as best practices.
Outreach and Engagement Ideas to Consider

There are many benefits of increased alumni engagement as mentioned in research results at Columbus State Community College (Team Mauritius, 2012). These benefits include:

- Enhanced visibility and participation of alumni on campus
- Alumni serving as speakers at conferences, professional development events, and in classrooms
- Valuable resources and networking opportunities for students
- Word-of-mouth promotion of college programs that could increase enrollment
- Accessibility to alumni volunteers for events
- Alumni mentoring opportunities to support student success
- Alumni engagement that fosters a sense of loyalty and financial support

Delaware Technical Community College’s 50th anniversary tag line was “Delivering excellence, changing lives.” The College exhibits its commitment to student success in a wide variety of areas by offering financial aid, child care, tutoring, developmental classes, learning communities, mandatory advising sessions, and many other programs designed to increase the chances that students reach their academic and professional goals. It’s time to get Delaware Tech alumni involved as partners in this effort to help the state’s community college students.

Although there is additional information and data collection to do before moving forward with any initiatives, there are some ideas to consider based on the best practices
outlined in this report. First, a social media plan could be designed by the public relations managers to post content for alumni on the College’s Facebook page. Content would have to be kept up to date and used as a tool to communicate with alumni. Delaware Tech’s Facebook page is typically followed by current students, so content could be created to attract alumni as followers. The College’s Twitter page would offer articles on employment information and trends in industries. Instagram could be used to connect alumni with things happening on the campuses. And finally, the College could use LinkedIn to keep up to date on contact and career information of graduates.

Another initiative worth considering is redesigning the Alumni page on the College website. This will not be difficult to do because the 50th anniversary micro-site can be used as an example of an effort that has reached our graduates, offered them valuable information, and collected information from them. One result from that effort was that the College found out that alumni were eager to share their stories and express their gratitude to the College and its employees for helping them succeed. The path to the alumni page should also become much easier to navigate so that graduates don’t have to search for it. The alumni page should be linked from the home page instead of hidden under “Giving.”

The last initiative to consider would be the most comprehensive and labor intensive of the three proposals. A task force could be created, which would include representatives from each campus, charged with increasing alumni engagement. Department chairs and other faculty must be included in the effort. Lippincott (2011) stresses the importance of involving faculty in collaborative efforts because for many
alumni, their strongest connection to the institution is not with the administration, but with the faculty. The task force could create and carry out a strategic plan aimed at engaging alumni to become guest speakers in classrooms and at events, act as mentors in a newly created mentoring program, participate in 5k races and other events, and act as volunteers to provide information to prospective students at Open House and to freshmen at New Student Orientation.

A survey could be emailed to all Delaware Tech alumni asking them about their interests and ideas regarding alumni involvement initiatives that would aid the task force in creating programs. Task force members could also be charged with the responsibility of conducting telephone interviews with alumni relations professionals from other community colleges to find out what they’re doing that is proving to be effective.

The task force would follow three levels of developing coalitions – information, strategy, and action (DeLuca, 1999). The survey and interview results, and literature would provide the group with the information they need to proceed. The strategy level could include the group developing a plan for outreach. And finally, the group would proceed to the action stage where significant engagement can begin to take place.

Although this initiative would involve a great deal of effort by employees, the College has implemented several similar programs that have been successful. Examples include the Blue Print Task Force, which conducted research and developed recommendations to increase student success, and the 50th Anniversary Task Force, which carried out a variety of initiatives statewide throughout 2016. If these alumni
engagement efforts are successful, they could provide extremely positive benefits for the College and its students.

All of these recommendations are supported by literature on alumni engagement that contains best practices and examples of similar efforts by other institutions that have been successful.
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Appendix D

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS IN ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Alumni engagement is an area that community colleges have historically neglected, but in an era of reduced state and community resources, it has become a new priority for many institutions across the nation. Since Delaware Technical Community College opened its doors over five decades ago, over 50,000 people have graduated from the institution. There are currently 15,000 students enrolled at campuses statewide, and since 97% of those students are Delawareans, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who could be engaged to become involved with the College once they graduate.

Skari and Ullman (2012) assert that community colleges have long been operating under the assumption that they should not waste time and resources reaching out to their alumni in hopes of financial or other types of support. They state that community colleges need a leader who incorporates alumni relations into the business of the college. This commitment is demonstrated by the leader attending alumni events and speaking publicly about the pride and value that comes from being an alum. They also stress the importance of investing staff and resources in alumni relations.
Lippincott (2011) agrees. He asserts that in order for an institution to get a return on investment, it must invest in the effort with adequate staffing, infrastructure, and financing. He notes that if alumni are the “foster children,” then their alma mater should be the “nourishing mother.”

Some characteristics of the four-year settlement advancement model can be effective for community colleges (Starace, 2012). These can include the president serving as the chief fundraiser. It can include recruiting alumni as volunteers for events. However, she recommends constructing a new model that is reflective of the community college student experience.

In an effort to collect best practices in alumni relations that have been effective in engaging alumni, I interviewed five subject matter experts. Four of them are employed by four-year universities, and one is the headmaster of a local private school. The objective of these interviews was to identify initiatives that can be implemented at Delaware Tech in order to improve alumni engagement.

Methodology

I emailed subject matter experts in the field of alumni relations telling them about my work and asking if they would be willing to be interviewed over the phone (see Appendix A). I included my list of ten questions with the email so they would have some advanced notice of what I would be asking. The questions were created according to issues related to alumni engagement identified in literature.
When the individuals replied that they would participate, I set up appointments that were convenient for them. During each phone interview, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, I took hand written notes.

Participants

The first subject matter expert that I interviewed was Dr. Melissa Starace. In addition to the fact that she serves as interim vice president for university advancement at the University of Scranton, she wrote her doctoral dissertation on the subject of community college alumni relations while studying at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation, entitled *Transforming nomads into settlers: A study of community college alumni engagement efforts in Pennsylvania*, is a rare example of research on the topic of alumni engagement in community colleges.

The second interview was with Dr. Jennifer Specter. She is the regional recruiter for Delaware and Maryland for the State University of New York. I approached her for an interview because of her research. She completed her dissertation, which is entitled *Enhancing alumni engagement: Tradition-building at the University of Delaware*, while completing her doctoral degree at the University of Delaware.

The next interview was with Stu Hanf, director of alumni relations at Wilmington University. Even though it is a four-year higher education institution with graduate programs, the University is similar to Delaware Tech in that it serves both traditional and non-traditional students who commute to class. On Wilmington University’s website, Stu
is quoted as saying, “In my opinion, having a strong and giving alumni base is one of the most important things a university can have.”

I then interviewed Dr. Barry Tull, headmaster of Worcester Preparatory School in Berlin, Maryland. Although it is a school that serves kindergarten through twelfth grade students, he focuses a great deal of effort on alumni engagement as evidenced by the alumni pages on the school’s website and the word of graduates.

My final interview was with Lauren Simione, associate vice president for alumni engagement and annual giving at the University of Delaware. The University of Delaware commits considerable resources to engage alumni. The website does more to engage alumni than any other one that I’ve seen during my work on this project. They also do an extraordinary job of keeping contact information up to date.

Methodology

In analyzing the results, several trends emerged. Responses were coded to identify common answers (see Appendix D). Four out of five respondents said that they include alumni in activities such as open house and new student orientation, implement initiatives to create school pride, recruit current students to volunteer, and encourage students throughout their education to participate in activities and events. Four of five respondents also asserted that tracking alumni is a challenge due to a lack of resources and personnel and reported that they bring alumni into classes related to their academic programs.

All five respondents mentioned that social media and their websites are effective ways to reach out to alumni and reported having a mentoring program and involving
alumni in early student experiences like new student orientation and later experiences like graduation.

With regard to young alumni, four out of five respondents mentioned that they use social media to inform them about events on campus and networking opportunities, ask them to volunteer for short-term commitments, and reach out to them via email.

Four out of five mentioned that having alumni involved with the institution makes them more excited to spread the word about the quality of the school and that alumni want to help, but they just need to be asked.

Finally, all respondents indicated that alumni are happy to be involved with career fairs, that the lack of resources and staff is their biggest obstacle, and that alumni relations professionals should work collaboratively with faculty and staff to implement initiatives.

Interview Summary

The first question I asked each participant was about what specific strategies they would recommend to treat students as future alumni (see Appendix B). A common theme was that alumni should be interacting with students from the beginning of their college experience, beginning with events like open house and new student orientation. Other student experiences that were recommended included partnering with student affairs professionals to have alumni involved in networking opportunities by hosting events on and off campus.
Another initiative that was recommended was having alumni speak in classes. This could include representatives from the Alumni Association talk to students about benefits they can enjoy through the association while they are students. These programs could include mentoring, networking, and other opportunities to meet graduates. Also recommended was having alumni speak in classes associated with their academic major in order to inspire students to persevere and complete their programs.

More than one respondent stated that students should be encouraged to volunteer at events that are sponsored by the institution and those hosted by the alumni association. The objective was that if they get engaged in community service for the school while students, they could be inspired to stay involved once they graduate. The event should include “Welcome Back, Alumni” banners that communicate to students that the institution wants them to welcome them to stay engaged once they graduate.

One institution presents a bucket list of campus traditions during new student orientation. The list is compiled by the alumni association, students, faculty, and staff and is championed by student alumni ambassadors during students’ years at the university. These ambassadors also promote student philanthropy, including the senior class gift.

Finally, experts said that efforts to create school pride in current students has a positive impact on engaging them as alumni. For instance, a class banner can be created for each freshman class that follows them through their years at the university – a banner that students have the opportunity to sign at various events. Another example would be an event hosted for seniors who will graduate soon that would involve alumni and serve
as an opportunity to provide the students with promotional items that communicate alumni pride in their school.

The second question asked subject matter experts what type of infrastructure and staffing they would recommend to support alumni engagement. A common theme was that, due to the reality of scarce resources, an institution needs to get alumni engagement assistance from others who are not necessarily in the alumni relations division. Work with people from other divisions such as student affairs, instruction, development, and marketing to recruit alumni.

One respondent stated that she had assembled a working group made up of people from all areas of her university. They meet four times a year to brainstorm ideas for alumni engagement and to report back on what’s working and what’s not.

Another recommendation related to multi-campus institutions, such as Delaware Tech. It was to have at least one person on each campus who focuses efforts on engaging alumni. It might be someone who is serving as alumni liaison, but has another job as well. All faculty and staff should also make an effort to communicate with students to reinforce the institution’s interest in keeping them involved as alumni.

One respondent stated that he relies on alumni to recruit other alumni to become involved, saying “What you get back is directly related to the number of alumni you have involved.”

The third question asked experts how successful they are at tracking alumni with updated contact information. All agreed that this is a challenge that is made more difficult
by a lack of resources, but that investment in tracking alumni is worth it because of the return the institution can experience. One respondent mentioned that his institution had recently purchased a new customer relations management (CRM) system to track updated contact information for alumni.

Social media is one tool they mentioned as helpful in connecting with alumni. Social media, mass emails, and websites can be used to provide links where alumni can connect to online forms and update their contact information. The challenge is to attract graduates to follow the college’s social media channels and to obtain up-to-date email addresses. This can be encouraged among current students and reinforced at graduation and other events.

The next interview question asked for examples of alumni involvement in their institutions that contribute to the success of current students. All interviewees mentioned that they bring alumni in to talk to students in their classrooms in a variety of subject areas. If it’s a physics class, bring in someone who is successful in a field related to physics. If it’s a communication class, ask an alum who has an exciting career in that field, such as a television reporter or public relations professional.

An additional recommendation from all five experts included creating a mentoring program that would allow students to be matched with graduates who could meet with them periodically to discuss their challenges and their progress. These mentors can also help them find opportunities for tours of facilities or internships related to their
academic programs. It was advised that individuals involved in alumni relations should partner with career services professionals to match students with alumni mentors.

One example of such a program is the creation of an advising network that connects students with alumni from all over the world using an online platform. Alumni can sign up to participate in 30-minute phone calls with advisees about career paths, resume critiques, and more. Advisees can choose from a large directory and reach out to the alum of their choice.

Also mentioned was that alumni should be invited to be involved in events such as open house, new student orientation, and career fairs. In addition, the institution should provide networking events for students to meet alumni from their academic programs. Another recommendation was to host events where alumni are honored, as well as to consider asking alumni to speak at commencement ceremonies and convocations.

A final recommendation related to student success was to promote a job and internship drive, which is like an annual fundraising initiative, except the goal is to collect jobs and internships from alumni instead of donations. The opportunities could range from a student shadowing an alum for one day to a more intensive internship. These are posted on the institution’s job portal used by all students.

When experts were asked what they currently do to engage young alumni, all agreed that social media should be an important tool. One way to reach them with social media is to use it to publicize upcoming events for alumni, such as Homecoming, ice cream socials, or networking opportunities. An additional recommendation was that
young alumni are interested in remaining engaged with affinity groups such as sports teams or clubs and that social media posts can keep them connected.

One respondent pointed out that it’s important to remember that young alumni are very focused on professional development opportunities, and they don’t have a lot of free time. They will participate in activities that they perceive as meaningful, however, such as committees, councils, advisory boards, and focus groups. Additional activities could include workshops on life skills such as money management, work-life balance, networking, and LinkedIn. These workshops could also offer free professional headshots. Finally, webinars on subjects like filing taxes or applying to graduate school are a meaningful way to reach young alumni, who are typically very mobile.

In response to a question about how they’ve been successful at engaging older alumni, most respondents stressed the effectiveness of newsletters and magazines that include information about the institution and current students, but also information about alumni. Email was also recommended because it’s direct and cost effective. In addition, they should receive mailings that tell them about lifelong learning opportunities in an attempt to get them re-engaged with the institution.

Another common answer was that older, more experienced alumni should be approached to serve on advisory boards and alumni association boards. They should also be approached to help with recruiting, mentoring, and providing internships. Due to their years working in their fields, they can be a valuable resource for current students.
One respondent recommended celebrating the 50\textsuperscript{th} reunion class each year during an alumni celebration. The members of that graduating class are invited to attend and are recognized with a pin welcoming them into the Gold Guard. Representatives of the 50\textsuperscript{th} class also march in the processional at graduation carrying their class banner.

Finally, one expert recommended hosting events that honor alumni who have been successful in their careers and have served their community. In addition to inviting students to these events, alumni from the honorees’ graduating year should be invited to attend. That connection could inspire them to reconnect with the institution.

The next question asked about what strategies they use to help their alumni act as ambassadors for their institution. Most respondents stressed that having alumni involved in activities and events makes them more excited about spreading the word about the quality of the school.

Keeping alumni informed through social media, newsletters, webinars, and emails was also mentioned as vital to helping alumni act as ambassadors because they remain updated about what the institution is doing. Inviting them to events that celebrate advancements in their former academic programs and asking them to speak in classes keeps them informed as well so they know what’s going on at the school now – not just when they were students.

Another recommendation was that a vibrant, easy to navigate, informative website is key in this effort. Alumni should be able to find out current information about a college’s programs so they can act as ambassadors. They can also feel comfortable
recommending that others visit the website to get comprehensive information about the school and its programs.

The eighth question asked respondents which activities they host that are particularly successful at attracting alumni volunteers. All five experts mentioned that they have no problem engaging alumni to be involved in career fairs. They also recommended inviting alumni to attend events on campus, such as presentations by guest speakers, such as a Hospice nurse talking about end of life care or an athletic trainer presenting tips for workouts and healthy eating.

Three respondents mentioned “Homecoming type” events that their alumni associations help to host. The events were held over an entire weekend and offered opportunities for alumni to attend social celebrations as well as sporting events – football at two schools and lacrosse at another. All three events focused a lot of effort welcoming alumni back to campus with banners, offering them tours, and including opportunities to meet current students.

Regional club events, such as happy hours, networking events, and a speaker series were also recommended to attract alumni who might not be close to campus anymore, but would like to participate in their local alumni club.

Finally, respondents mentioned that they have experienced success in engaging alumni to be involved in community service projects – either related to student clubs, their academic program, or campus initiatives.
The next question asked them to identify their biggest challenges related to alumni engagement. Lack of time, staffing, and resources was mentioned by all five respondents. They stressed that, though they depend on alumni volunteers to help them recruit others, it’s not always the optimal way – especially when attempting to obtain updated contact information.

The other major challenge was that graduates are spread out across the region and the country. It’s important to rely on the ones that stay local and know others that are local. Some communication methods, such as social media and email, can reach alumni and get them to reconnect electronically, but local alumni are needed to volunteer for and attend events in order to inspire current students and communicate the quality of the institution’s programs.

The final question asked them what lessons they’ve learned that have helped them be successful at alumni engagement. A common answer was that institutions should not be afraid to ask alumni to volunteer. People are willing to help, but they need the request to be focused so they feel that they are adding value. Volunteering that puts them in contact with students from their majors is an important way to making them feel that their efforts are worthwhile.

Another recommendation was that it’s important to listen to what alumni want. It’s also important to communicate with them honestly and often. And in those communication efforts, remember to include volunteer and networking opportunities and lifelong learning programs, as well as information about cutting-edge initiatives that the
institution is involved in. And when communicating about those initiatives, sometimes it’s necessary to “think outside the box” because the target population is extremely large and diverse.

An additional lesson was that it is important to groom students to be successful alumni before they even walk in the door. Think of the primacy effect – that the first impression will be a lasting one.

All five stressed the importance of cooperating with people from different divisions on campus so that alumni can be engaged in a variety of events and activities that are already going on. Alumni want to be engaged, but many times institutions forget to ask.

Finally, two respondents said that alumni relations professionals should not be afraid to try something. If it fails, it fails. Sometimes initiatives are unsuccessful, but there are lessons to be learned from failure as well as success.

Because there were common themes expressed among the five subject matter experts I interviewed, I created a chart that illustrates this (see Appendix D).

Conclusion

There were common recommendations from these subject matter experts that are worth considering at Delaware Technical Community College. Some of the ones that stand out related to communicating effectively using tools like social media, the website, emails, and newsletters. Others related to reaching out to alumni and providing them with
meaningful opportunities to connect with the institution and its students. Finally, although many community colleges lack sufficient human and technology resources to contact alumni, there are creative ways to reach them through other alumni and employees that work in a variety of divisions who should be involved in these efforts.
References


Hi Dr. Specter:

My name is Christine Gillan, and I am in the process of writing my Educational Leadership Portfolio to complete my Ed.D. at the University of Delaware. My topic is "Increasing Alumni Engagement at Delaware Technical Community College." Your research regarding tradition building has been really helpful to me as I complete artifacts for my project.

As part of my ELP, I would like to interview subject matter experts on the topic of alumni engagement. I've attached a list of questions that have been approved by the University of Delaware's IRB. Do you have any time in early October for a phone interview? I promise not to take up too much of your time.

Thank you,

Christine
Subject Matter Experts in Alumni Engagement

Interview Questions

1. Since a lot of research on alumni engagement stresses treating students like future alumni the minute they walk into their first class, what specific strategies would you recommend to achieve that?

2. Community colleges typically lack a sufficient infrastructure to support alumni engagement. Can you describe what you think would be an optimal staffing situation for a four-campus college that serves roughly 15,000 students a year?

3. How successful is your institution at tracking alumni with updated contact information?

4. What are some examples of alumni involvement in your institution that contribute to the success of your current students?

5. How have you been successful in engaging young alumni?

6. How have you been successful in engaging older alumni?

7. What strategies do you use to help your alumni act as ambassadors for your institution?

8. Which activities or events does your institution host that are particularly successful at attracting alumni volunteers?

9. What do you see as your biggest challenges in engaging alumni to remain involved with the institution?

10. What lessons have you learned that have helped you be more successful at alumni engagement?
Subject Matter Experts in Alumni Relations and Engagement

Interview 1
Dr. Melissa Starace
Interim Vice President for University Advancement
University of Scranton
Melissa.starace@scranton.edu
Monday, Oct. 2 – 4 p.m.

Interview 2
Dr. Jennifer Specter
Regional Recruiter for Delaware and Maryland
State University of New York
Jennifer.Specter@suny.edu
Wednesday, October 4, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.

Interview 3
Mr. Stu Hanf
Director of Alumni Relations
Wilmington University
stuart.j.hanf@wilmu.edu
October 11, 2017 – 2:30 p.m.

Interview 4
Dr. Barry Tull
Headmaster
Worcester Preparatory School
btull@worcesterprep.org
October 27, 2017 – 10:30 a.m.

Interview 5
Lauren Murray Simione
Associate Vice President for Alumni Engagement and Annual Giving
University of Delaware
lemurray@udel.edu
October 30, 2017 – 1:30 p.m.
Table 4

Subject Matter Expert Interview Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions and Responses</th>
<th>Subject Matter Experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Since a lot of research on alumni engagement stresses treating students like future</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>alumni the minute they walk into their first class, what specific strategies would you</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>recommend to achieve that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include alumni in early activities such as open house, new student orientation, and</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first year experience events.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement initiatives to create school pride such as creating class banners, using</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school colors at every event, and bring back graduates to speak to current students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with career services professionals and alumni to create networking opportunities</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and provide mentoring.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit students to volunteer at events sponsored by the institution and events hosted</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by the alumni association.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide students with encouragement throughout their academic years to participate in</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities, events, and traditions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Community colleges typically lack a sufficient infrastructure to support alumni    |
   engagement. Can you describe what you think would be an optimal staffing situation  |
   for a four-campus college that serves roughly 15,000 students a year?
Due to scarce resources related to alumni relations, work collaboratively with faculty and staff in other divisions such as student affairs, development, marketing, and instruction to engage alumni.

Recruit alumni in the community to be ambassadors and recruit other alumni to be involved with the institution.

3. How successful is your institution at tracking alumni with updated contact information?

It’s a big challenge due to lack of resources and personnel.

We’ve just purchased a new CRM to track alumni better.

We do a pretty good job of it because it’s been a priority for years.

Social media and the website are effective ways to reach out and ask alumni for updated contact information.

4. What are some examples of alumni involvement in your institution that contribute to the success of your current students?

We bring alumni back to talk to classes related to their academic program.

We have a mentoring program that matches students and alumni.

We involve alumni in early student experiences like new student orientation and later experiences like graduation.

We team up with Career Services to host career fairs and networking events that include our alumni.

We work with Career Services on a Job & Internship Drive and a Winter Term Job Shadow Program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions and Responses</th>
<th>Subject Matter Experts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. How have you been successful in engaging young alumni?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use social media to inform young alumni about events on campus and networking opportunities.</td>
<td>x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use social media to keep alumni engaged with any affinity groups they might have been part of as a student.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We ask young alumni to volunteer for short-term commitments like events because they don’t have as much time for a long-term obligation.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to create opportunities for meaningful involvement by young alumni, asking them to participate on committees, councils, advisory boards, and focus groups.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How have you been successful in engaging older alumni?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters and magazines are an effective way to reach older alumni and communicate information about the institution, current students, and alumni.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email is a good way to reach them because it’s direct and cost effective.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older alumni should be approached to serve on advisory boards and alumni association boards because they have experience.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate the 50th reunion class each year and welcome them into the Gold Guard with a celebration and then have them in the procession at graduation carrying a banner or host some other type of celebration that honors graduates.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What strategies do you use to help your alumni act as ambassadors for your institution?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

123
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions and Responses</th>
<th>Subject Matter Experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having alumni involved in activities and events makes them more excited to spread the word about the quality of the school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep them informed through social media, newsletters, webinars, and emails.</td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a vibrant, easy-to-navigate website that they can use to get information and then recommend the site to others.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have them speak in classrooms and be involved in activities such as open house, new student orientation, and graduation.</td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep them involved in alumni clubs so they are actively engaged and excited to talk about the institution.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Which activities or events does your institution host that are particularly successful at attracting alumni volunteers?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumni are always happy to be involved in career fairs.</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite them to attend events that involve guest speakers on topics that they care about.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host a Homecoming weekend that is fun for families.</td>
<td>x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host happy hours and networking events.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite alumni to be involved in community service projects.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What do you see as your biggest challenges in engaging alumni to remain involved with the institution?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of time, resources, and staffing is the biggest obstacle.</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates are spread out all over, so it’s difficult to get them to volunteer and attend events.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and Responses</td>
<td>Subject Matter Experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What lessons have you learned that have helped you be more successful at alumni engagement?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask alumni to volunteer. They want to help.</td>
<td>x x x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t be afraid to try something new and think outside of the box.</td>
<td>x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to what alumni want and communicate with them.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat students as future alumni.</td>
<td>x x x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work collaboratively with faculty and staff from other divisions to implement alumni engagement initiatives.</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix E

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore which engagement activities students would be interested in participating in now and after they graduate from Delaware Technical Community College. A link to a Qualtrics survey was emailed to approximately 15,000 students that are currently enrolled in academic programs at Delaware Tech statewide. Students were asked to complete the anonymous and optional survey, which contained 22 different activities that they were asked to rate in a Likert Scale ranging from one (no interest at all) to five (very interested). The introduction at the top of the survey instrument informed them that they should rate the activities that they would like to participate in as students or alumni (see Appendix B).

A total of 801 students responded. Although there were students interested in all of the activities on the list, the most popular ones with an average value of over 3 were participating in a community service project, receiving resume assistance in the Career Services Center, participating in a career fair, and attending networking events with students from their academic major. The least popular activities with an average value of less than 2.5 included presenting at a 1 Million Cups event, tutoring students in the Math Center, tutoring students in the Writing Center, and contributing toward a scholarship
fund. All other activities on the survey had an average value of over 2.5. It’s also important to note, however, that there were no average values under 2.

Considering the level of interest in these activities, the College should recruit students to become involved in them while they are students with the goal of maintaining their engagement when they later become alumni.

Introduction

Alumni engagement is an area that community colleges have historically neglected, but in an era of reduced state and community resources, it has become a priority for many institutions across the nation. Since Delaware Technical Community College opened its doors over five decades ago, over 50,000 people have graduated from the institution. There are currently 15,000 students enrolled at campuses statewide, and since 97% of those students are Delawareans, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who could be engaged to become involved with the College once they graduate.

There are significant challenges associated with establishing ongoing relationships with community college students, however. The early community college student experience can be described as “transactional” or “nomadic,” and administrators need to learn how to transform the former nomads into alumni “settlements” who will stay connected with and supportive of the institution once they finish their academic program (Starace, 2012).
Much of the research on alumni engagement stresses that the key to success is treating current students as future alumni. This begins with their first year impressions of the institution. Attrition for most institutions is most frequent during the first year of college, and nearly all “leavers” do so before the beginning of the second year (Specter, 2012).

Literature strongly suggests that higher levels of student engagement leads to higher levels of alumni engagement (Hall, 2016). In addition to relationships, experiences are an important part of a student’s feelings about an institution.

The time students spend at their undergraduate institution shapes their perceptions and experience for years following their time on campus (Vanderbout, 2010). Graduates who had rewarding experiences and believed the school contributed to their success feel more connected to their alma mater, become more engaged, and contribute financially when able to do so. Many administrators focus on the importance of student experiences as part of making it to graduation when they should be focused on retaining them for life.

In order to create outreach initiatives to engage current students, I needed to find out what kinds of activities students would be interested in. This survey will provide data to inform which initiatives would be most successful in attracting student involvement that could lead to increased alumni involvement once they graduate.

Design and Methodology

Sample
Delaware Technical Community College is the state’s only community college with campuses in Wilmington, Stanton, Dover, and Georgetown. There are approximately 15,000 students in academic programs statewide, and all students received an email with a link to the Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A).

All students are provided a Delaware Tech email address when they enroll. Instructors, financial aid representatives, and counselors use this email address to communicate with students.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 801 students responded, representing roughly 5% of the student population. The student population at Delaware Tech reflects the diversity of the communities served by the College. In fact, Delaware Tech serves more Delaware women and more Delaware minorities than all of the state’s institutions of higher education combined.

Figure 4 Delaware Tech Student Population
Instrument

The survey asked students to rate their interest in participating in 22 different activities either as a student or as an alum once they graduate. The list of activities was informed by literature on alumni engagement. The instrument was a Likert Scale survey that asked for them to rate each activity from one indicating no interest at all to five indicating very interested.

Some of the activities listed involved working with students to help them academically. Others involved participating in community service projects, attending events, taking advantage of career services opportunities, and volunteering to help staff fundraising events. To see the full questionnaire, see Appendix B.

Data Collection

The link to the Qualtrics survey was emailed to all Delaware Tech students on September 25, 2017. The survey was one page in length, and the introduction at the top informed them that the information they shared would be anonymous. Data was collected and recorded in a table using Qualtrics analytics on October 9, 2017 (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Four of the activities had an average value above 3. Participating in a community service project received the highest level of interest with an average value of 3.42. Receiving resume assistance in the Career Services Center was next with an average
value of 3.40. Also rated above three were attending networking events with students from your academic major at 3.36 and participating in a career fair at 3.28.

Other activities that were rated close to three were attending an annual alumni picnic with an average value of 2.93, attending sporting events on campus at 2.84, creating a student internship opportunity at 2.81, and sharing your experiences with prospective students at Open House at 2.79. Additionally, mentoring a student, attending a Global Understandings workshop, and assisting with learning community field trips all had an average value of 2.77.

The activities with slightly lower average values included leading a community service project at 2.71 and registering on a fundraising website to encourage friends and family to contribute to scholarships at 2.59. Participating on the Alumni Association Board and on an Advisory Board both had average values of 2.57, and attending “1 Million Cups” events was 2.55.

Although none of the activities had an average value below two, there were some that were close. The least popular activity was presenting a business idea at a “1 Million Cups” event, which is a weekly entrepreneurship event held weekly on each campus, at 2.06. Others with low average values included being a guest speaker in a class at 2.36, contributing toward a scholarship fund at 2.42, tutoring in the Math Center at 2.45, and tutoring in the Writing Center at 2.49. There was more interest in tutoring students in other subjects, however, with an average value of 2.64.

Discussion
The fact that participating in a community service project was the most popular activity reflects well on Delaware Tech students and has implications for their involvement in community service once they graduate. Goldsberry (2007) researched the impact of collegiate engagement experiences in community service and found that civic involvement during the undergraduate years led to civic involvement post-graduation. She concluded that if admissions and development staff reinforce the value and importance of engaging in civic activities in the campus environment, it can lead to involvement with the institution or to give back as alumni. Student affairs professionals and faculty can offer opportunities for these experiences through classroom assignments, academic clubs, and service learning semesters.

The other three most popular activities were related to students gaining employment in their fields. This seems to reveal high motivation among Delaware Tech students to participate in activities that will help them get a job in their field once they graduate. This interest is reflected in results of our most recent graduate survey, which revealed that 98% of our 2016 graduates are employed or continuing education, and 58% are doing both. Thus, even though many students transfer to four-year colleges and universities to pursue bachelor’s degrees, the majority of them are working in their fields at the same time. Two of these activities are already available for students. The College currently offers resume assistance in Career Centers statewide, as well as career fairs. However, there are few networking events for students with others in their academic major.
It was interesting that students wanted to attend an annual alumni picnic. The College does not currently host annual alumni picnics, but that information could support such an initiative. I was surprised to see the interest in attending sporting events because attendance is not typically high at Delaware Tech athletic events, but if students are interested, it is possible that the College is not doing an effective job at communicating the schedules to students or does not do enough to make it easy for students to attend.

The fact that students were interested in creating student internship opportunities, sharing their experiences with prospective students at Open House, assisting with learning community field trips, and mentoring a student indicates that they feel positive about their experience at Delaware Tech and are interested in giving their time to help future students.

Recommendations for Action

Maynard (2011) conducted research that identified a strong relationship between undergraduate community service and community involvement by alumni. The results hold promise for the long-term value of engaging students in community service activities to promote civic awareness, active citizenship, and enduring community involvement of alumni. They also point to the fact that what students experience has an impact on their alumni behavior. Community colleges could benefit by keeping alumni involved in community service projects once they graduate. Those projects could be aimed at benefitting current students or others in the surrounding community.

With this research in mind and considering the high level of student interest in community service projects, the first recommendation is to increase opportunities for
students to participate in community service. There are current initiatives in place that are supported by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and a variety of student clubs. There are also campaigns to collect items for food banks, the Red Cross, and shelters. Additional opportunities could include community service projects by students with others who share their academic major or projects that are led by alumni with a team comprised of alumni and students.

In light of student interest in resume assistance and attendance at career fairs, the College should increase efforts to communicate these options to students so all students are aware of their existence. Their interest in networking events indicates that the College should work with the Instruction Division to create a plan to host networking events for students that are specific to their majors. There are currently department chairs who host such events, so they will be instrumental in the effort to inspire others to do so.

Hosting an alumni picnic is an initiative that could begin with an event that would include students and alumni. Currently, there is a picnic hosted by the Alumni Chapter at the Georgetown campus for new graduates following commencement rehearsal. This event could be enhanced by inviting other alumni to attend and talk with graduates. Other campuses host different celebrations following commencement rehearsal, so they could also include alumni in those events. Hopefully, graduates would return to the event the next year as alumni. Current students could also be engaged to volunteer at these events, which could inspire them to complete their degrees.
Finally, considering student interest in helping future students, the College should communicate volunteer opportunities to current students and recent graduates. Wampler (2013) stresses that colleges and universities are starting to work more strategically to educate students about what’s awaiting them once they are alumni. They communicate with current students that their experience with the college will change upon graduation, but they can maintain a lifelong connection with the institution. His research asserts that many institutions have significant student outreach programs, but then they do little to bridge the experience into the alumni years.

Conclusion

Delaware Technical Community College has traditionally not focused a great deal of effort in engaging alumni. That is changing at the College. There have been recent initiatives by the Development Division to create an updated database with alumni contact information. A College-wide Alumni Association has been created with representation from each campus chapter. And there are events targeted at engaging alumni, such as a reception at Camden Yards hosted by an alumna who is now the head groundskeeper there.

Lippincott (2011) asserts that the value of engaged alumni extends well beyond financial contributions. “They are advisors, advocates, and allies in support of institutional mission highly motivated not only by loyalty, but also by a vested interest in seeing the equity of their diplomas over time.”
This survey indicates interest in additional areas that could attract the involvement of current students and alumni. Attracting them to participate in these activities could lead them to remain engaged throughout their lifetime. By tailoring activities to their interests, the College and its students can benefit from an increased level of engagement.
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Email for Student Survey

Hello:

Would you please take a few minutes to use the link below to participate in an anonymous survey for Delaware Tech students? The survey asks for your interest in a variety of activities and initiatives that you might like to be involved in as a student or in the future as a graduate. You have no obligation to participate in any of these activities.

We would sincerely appreciate your input.

Christine Gillan
Director of Strategic Communication
Office of the President
Delaware Technical Community College
**Student Survey**

Please rate the activities below with the scale of 1 indicating no interest at all and 5 indicating very interested:

**Activities:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leading a community service project</td>
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### Figure 5  Student Survey Results

#### Activities:

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Appendix F

ALUMNI FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Introduction

Delaware Technical Community College opened its doors in 1967, and since that
time approximately 50,000 individuals have graduated from the College with an associate
degree. Ninety-seven percent of Delaware Tech’s student population is made up of
Delawareans who tend to stay in the state after graduation. According to the latest survey,
96% of 2016 graduates are employed or continuing their education, and 58% are doing
both.

Delaware Technical Community College could benefit significantly from
increased alumni engagement. Graduates could serve as role models and mentors for
students and inspire them to complete their degrees. They could provide internship and
networking opportunities. They could volunteer at events and activities that raise funds
and project a positive image in the community. And they can act as ambassadors in the
community promoting Delaware Tech as a high quality education choice.

Delaware Tech’s low graduation rate is similar to most community colleges
nationwide, which is the result of the many unique challenges faced by community
college students. If alumni were more engaged with the College, it could give students
additional support and inspiration to complete their degrees. But how can we effectively engage them?

I conducted a focus group of Delaware Tech alumni in each county to ask them about their Delaware Tech experience, their interests in alumni engagement, and their communication preferences. The objective was to find out how they would like for the College to engage them and if they were interested in becoming involved with Delaware Tech as alumni.

Method

Since my job at the College does not allow me much contact with students, I reached out to department chairs and alumni chapter presidents to help me invite alumni to participate in the focus groups. I developed nine questions that were approved by IRBs at the University of Delaware and Delaware Tech (see Appendix A). My questions were informed by scholarly articles containing best practices in alumni engagement.

The first focus group was conducted at the College’s campus in Georgetown in a large conference room in the Student Services Center. The second one was held in the campus director’s board room at Delaware Tech’s Stanton campus. And the third was held in the board room of the Office of the President on the College’s Dover campus. All three rooms have long tables that accommodated group discussion. I recorded all of the sessions and had the recordings transcribed by an online service.

All participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous in the transcript and in the report.
Participants

Twenty-four graduates participated in the focus group in Georgetown. Fifteen individuals participated in Stanton and 10 in Dover. There were graduates from every decade that the College has been open. Each group was diverse in age, gender, and academic major. All were currently employed, and some were also continuing their education at other higher education institutions.

Participants attended voluntarily as a result of someone inviting them – a department chairperson, an instructor, a counselor, or an administrator.

Focus Group Discussion Summary

At the beginning of each focus group session I read my opening statement, which let them know why I was hosting the sessions and what kinds of questions to expect. (Appendix B) I assured them that the focus group would be approximately an hour, but they were free to leave early if that was necessary. I also asked them to speak honestly, promised them confidentiality, and told them that they didn’t need to answer every question.

The first question asked participants to describe their experience as a Delaware Tech student. Comments mostly centered around faculty and staff and included “Each instructor was very concerned about each individual student,” “I felt that the staff were very invested in helping me grow as a nurse,” and “I appreciated the flexibility of the staff to work with my work schedule.” Other statements included, “The instructors are here to make you succeed,” “This college is a community of caring,” and “I was nervous
about going back to school, but from the beginning until graduation, there was always someone willing to help me through the process.”

When they were asked what about experiences they had that shaped their opinion of the College, one participant mentioned her experience as an athlete. “Once I joined the cross country team, I became more involved in doing campus things because you build a family and relationships with people.” Some mentioned interactions with instructors. “None of my instructors were just repeating what they learned from a book. They were sharing years of field experience.” “My instructors in criminal justice all had experience, and as I’m applying to police agencies, they say that I have an upper hand because of the instructors I’ve had.” Finally, some participants talked about the support of other students. “The students that I worked with were very devoted and worked really hard.” “It just helps that you can go into your classes knowing you’ll be successful because your classmates and instructors want to provide the help you need.”

In response to a question about specific support they received from faculty, staff, or students that helped them achieve their degrees, they had more positive comments about faculty like “When I wanted to quit, my teacher wouldn’t let me,” “In one math class, I just wasn’t getting it, and my teacher brought in cubes and things and offered real life examples that made it a whole lot easier,” and “My professor came in on a Saturday to give me my test early because I had a work trip.” Another participant commented about staff support. “For me it was a staff member. I was already working at Del Tech, and every time she’d see me, she would say, ‘Have you signed up for school?’ or ‘Are
you going to school?’, so I finally applied, and then she helped me get into the classes I needed.”

When asked if any of them were currently involved with the College in any way, a few responded that they attend alumni association chapter meetings. One participant said that she volunteers with the cross country team and helps student athletes maintain eligibility by tutoring them. One person said that she’d like to volunteer to help with the nursing program. The discussion took a turn in one group when people brought up involvement with their four-year institution, but most agreed that they still feel more of a connection with Delaware Tech. According to one participant, “When I was at WilmU, I was just focused on working and going to school, and I didn’t stay connected to them. I think I have more of a connection to Delaware Tech because that was where I started.”

The fifth question asked them to discuss what programs would encourage them to become involved with helping current students succeed. Examples could include mentoring, tutoring, being a guest speaker in a class, or other ideas. Several responded that they would like to participate in a mentoring program, and others said that they’d be willing to speak in a classroom. One person said, “I’d like to help grow the diversity on campus and specifically the LGBTQ community – act as a mentor for that.” Others expressed interest in participating in information sessions and open house. “Since we all love Delaware Tech, we can be good representatives to talk to prospective students. We have those real life stories to share.”
The groups were then asked if they had any interest in volunteering for or attending special events on campus, and if so, which ones? A few participants in each group stated that they didn’t know that they could volunteer for events like 5k races or fundraisers. One said, “I’d love to volunteer, but I’ve never been asked.” There was also interest expressed about participating in community service projects, a panel discussion, a picnic for graduates, open house, and new student orientation. One participant stated, “I think the individual events are easier to commit to because you feel like I can commit to that date, that time, versus when I sign up for something that’s more longstanding.”

The seventh question was, “Are there other events or activities that you would like to see here on campus that would attract your involvement as an alumnus of this College?” One participant responded, “I think the best way to recruit alumni is through organizations that they were once a part of like PTK or SGA because they feel a connection to those groups.” Others mentioned families and said, “Host family-oriented activities so we can bring our families to campus,” or “I like the family activities. There’s a college in my hometown that hosts a trick or treat event every year. It gets everybody excited about being at the school.”

In response to a question asking them if they read the Delaware Tech Magazine, several replied that they don’t. Some said they don’t receive it in the mail. Others said that they would read it if they received it electronically. Responses from those who said they read it included, “I really like the alumni profiles – to see where graduates are now,” and “It’s cool to see information on graduates from a long time ago – like the speaker of the house.” Others said, “I like reading it, but I would like to see more appeals to alumni
to get involved in events and activities,” and “There should definitely be more highlights on events where alumni can come back.”

The final question asked participants about how they’d like for the College to communicate with them about activities and events. A few said direct mail, such as postcards, and a few said social media would be effective for alerting them to upcoming events. The vast majority, however, said email was best with statements such as “I like email because it’s direct,” “Email is more personal,” and “I like email best, but don’t send one every week.” One respondent said, “One thing Penn State does is they send you an email with kind of a snapshot of what the article is about. And then you click on the link, and it takes you to a social media page or the article online.” And one respondent stated, “Communicate with us way ahead of time so we can put something on the calendar, but send a reminder closer to the event.”

Methodology

When examining the recordings of all three focus groups, specific trends emerged. Many were interested in supporting current students by serving as mentors or speaking in classrooms. Another common theme was that they wanted to be communicated with via email and read the magazine electronically. Several individuals in all three focus groups were interested in sharing their stories and updating their contact information. They also were enthusiastic about participating in events on campus like open house or new student orientation. Finally, almost everyone who talked about their experience at Delaware Tech described fond memories. They were interested in
becoming involved with the College and expressed that their experiences as students made them feel a real connection – both to the faculty and staff, as well as the institution itself.

Recommendations

I was pleasantly surprised at the enthusiastic response from alumni to participate in these focus group discussions. They expressed their appreciation at being asked to share their opinions and their desire to re-connect with the College and help prospective and current students succeed. Many also expressed their interest in volunteering for fundraising events.

It is my recommendation that Delaware Tech:

- Create a mentoring program that matches students with alumni.
- Recruit alumni to speak in classrooms, at new student orientation, and at open house.
- Send regular emails to alumni to inform them about opportunities to volunteer for or attend events.
- Invite alumni to share their stories using the form on the Delaware Tech website and then publicize those stories on the website, in the magazine, and on social media.
- Email the magazine to alumni so they can read it electronically.
- Continue to improve the database of alumni contact information in order to reach more alumni.
Conclusion

Few community colleges have focused many resources and efforts to engage alumni over the years, and Delaware Tech is no exception. However, recent efforts have been made to update the email database, host alumni events, and communicate more effectively with alumni using social media, the website, and the magazine. However, these focus groups were very informative, revealing alumni opinions about how the institution can improve its efforts to engage them to help the College and its students. All who attended expressed positive experiences as students, and most said that they would like to be involved with the College. They just want to be asked.
Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience as a student at Delaware Tech.

2. What experiences did you have that shaped your opinion of the College?

3. What are specific examples of support you received from faculty, staff or students that helped you achieve your degree?

4. Are any of you still involved with the College in any way? If so, how?

5. Please discuss what programs would encourage you to become involved with helping current students succeed. Examples could include mentoring, tutoring, being a guest speaker in a class, or other ideas.

6. Do you have any interest in volunteering for or attending special events on campus? If so, which ones interest you? Please see the list of events posted in the front of the room.

7. Are there other events or activities that you would like to see here on campus that would attract your involvement as an alum of this College? If so, what are they?

8. Do you read the alumni magazine? If so, what articles interest you the most? Profiles of alumni, athletics, features, academic programs?

9. What other ways would you like for the College to communicate with you about activities and events? Email? Social media? Other ideas?
Focus Group Introductory Statement

Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion today. We’ve invited you here so that we can discuss opportunities for our alumni to be engaged and involved with Delaware Tech. We sincerely appreciate you taking the time to provide your input so that we can create worthwhile and meaningful programs that allow you as alumni to support the success of our students and share your valuable experience and knowledge.

I’m going to ask you some questions about your feelings about Delaware Tech and then ask your opinions about specific opportunities that either exist already or could be created that would engage alumni. Our session will take about an hour, but you may leave before that if you wish.

Please share your honest opinions about each of the topics we discuss. You do not have to answer every question – only the ones that you want to address. All of the information we collect today will only be used by Delaware Tech staff members. All of your identities and comments will remain confidential.
Appendix G

WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Introduction

The importance of a college or university’s website should not be underestimated. Beyond attracting new students, an institution’s website is “part of its very identity—and an online extension of its physical location” (Web Design Degree Center, 2015). With this in mind, a website communicates the college’s priorities as well. While recruiting students is a high priority for most institutions and guided the redesign of Delaware Technical Community College’s website six years ago, there are additional targets that can and should be reached using this very important tool.

Kolowich (2017) asserts that a college website is the front door of the campus and needs to attract and inform current and prospective students, their families, alumni, professors, and donors. She further states that an effective website needs to be user friendly, convey value to different personas, and be attractive and engaging.

The home page is key in engaging visitors. Currently, there is not a link dedicated to alumni on the Delaware Tech home page. The way that a user finds alumni information is by using the “Giving” link. While I found this to be the case on a few other higher education institution websites I visited, most of the sites identified as the best college websites by various marketing and consulting firms have a link for alumni on the
home page. Buried links are a problem because they communicate the lack of importance the institution places on that topic or group of users (University Business Magazine, 2004). Thus, targeting alumni with a link that is dedicated to them communicates that the College is making them a priority.

Another aspect to consider is the use of social media to drive people to the College’s website. According to Joly (2016), social media drives less than five percent of traffic to higher education websites. She cites two possible explanations for this: the lack of calls to action on the website and the absence of effective cross-channel tracking. In 2017, Delaware Tech consolidated all social media channels from separate campus platforms into one college-wide channel per social media platform. This made it much easier to provide links on the home page of the website to the College’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, and LinkedIn accounts. Recently, the College has been reaching out to alumni with advertisements for alumni events on LinkedIn, which should result in more alumni traffic on the website. The site needs improvements to be more welcoming to them, however.

Joly (2006) states that colleges should embrace incremental design rather than feel the need to implement a complete website redesign every few years. She asserts that organizations like Amazon and eBay purposely make incremental changes to prevent them from disorienting or losing customers. Changes to the alumni portion of Delaware Tech’s website can maintain the same look as the rest of the site, but can do a more effective job of engaging alumni.
But what do alumni want from the website? McClure (2012) states that it’s vital to keep each target audience in mind. Students want access to information about academic programs, financial aid, and activities. When Hope College redesigned their website, they conducted focus groups that included four prospective and two current students, parents, a faculty member, a prospective faculty member, alumni, and community residents (Shein, 2015). It was important to them that all of these users provided input about what they wanted to be able to do on the website.

Research on millennial alumni perceptions of communications media revealed that recent graduates were typically drawn to the site for directory information to contact previous faculty and staff they had worked with as students (Anthony, 2014). Alumni who visited the website in that study found it to be user friendly and easy to navigate. They liked the photography and interactive slide shows. They reacted negatively to factors such as unappealing graphics and a lack of content aimed at keeping alumni involved with their alma mater. They suggested adding a calendar of events to the alumni page, as well as resources to motivate alumni activity.

When visiting various websites, it’s apparent that institutions provide different options for alumni involvement that are tailored to their identity as a college. For example, the Rhode Island School of Design, which was a Webby Award honoree in the School/University category in 2012, offers these tabs on its alumni page:

- Alumni network
- Art sale
- Benefits
- Exhibitions
- RISD Weekend/Reunions
- RISD XYZ Magazine
- Support RISD
- Transcript Requests

Middlebury College has also received recognition as one of 14 of the best college websites by HubSpot Marketing. The website features colorful bars that act as a navigation system and offers the following choices on the alumni page:

- Alumni home
- Parents
- Volunteers
- Events
- Reunion
- Young alumni
- Alumni association
- Chapters
- Resources
- Career services
- Frequently asked questions
- Contact us
Recent focus groups reveal that Delaware Tech alumni want a lot of the same information. They want to volunteer at and attend events. They want access to career services help. They expressed their willingness to attend student events like open house and new student orientation. They’re interested in sharing their experiences with current students in order to help them succeed by being mentors, providing internships, and speaking in classrooms. They want to read the magazine, but they want to do it online. They want to read about other alumni on the website.

Methodology
In order to explore what other regional four-year higher education institutions and community colleges were doing on their websites to engage alumni, I compiled a list of features that have been recommended in literature and professional articles and by focus groups and compared websites of the University of Delaware, Delaware State University, Community College of Philadelphia, Rockland Community College, Mesa Community College, and Delaware Technical Community College (see Appendix A).

Findings
As is illustrated in Appendix A, the University of Delaware had the most engaging alumni page according to best practices defined in the literature, but the
Community College of Philadelphia was not far behind. Delaware Tech was similar to Delaware State University, Rockland Community College, and Mesa Community College in the type of features that are offered to alumni. Delaware Tech was the only institution that did not have direct access for alumni from the home page.

When I met with the College’s web manager, I found out that some of the desired features exist on the website – they’re just not on the alumni page. Examples of this include merchandise to purchase, lifelong learning opportunities, and awards and recognition. It was also interesting to find that he had already been thinking about ideas to redesign the alumni page. We discussed a variety of changes that would enhance the website experience for alumni and do more to engage them to become involved with the College and its students.

Conclusion

A significant number of improvements were made to the alumni page of Delaware Tech’s website (see Appendix B and Appendix C).

The first major change was providing alumni with a direct link from the College’s home page. Then, when a user gets to the main alumni page, the old photo of graduates was replaced with a new, more engaging photo. The message under the photo was also changed from one that conveyed the mission of the alumni association to a more welcoming message that encourages alumni to get involved and share their stories. There is also an attractive link at the top that encourages alumni to update their contact
information, learn more about the College’s initiatives, volunteer at a campus event, or share their story.

Two videos of alumni in their workplaces talking about their Delaware Tech experiences were placed on the page, and a link to the alumni magazine was more prominently placed. The alumni home page also now contains three recent news stories featuring alumni, and there is an opportunity to link to “Alumni News,” which contains many alumni stories and photos. The same is true for the “Alumni Success Stories,” which are profile stories written about alumni from a variety of academic programs. There are four featured on the alumni home page, but the user can follow a link to 54 alumni profiles.

Another new feature is an alumni event calendar. Users can find information about events such as 5K races, distinguished alumni celebrations, donor luncheons, and galas at each campus. Items on the calendar contain basic information about each event, and alumni can obtain more information or register for an event by using the links in the calendar.

Previously, alumni benefits were listed on the alumni home page. They are still listed, but users can use a new link to access additional alumni benefits on a page that includes information about scholarships, career services, and transcripts, as well as information about how to purchase a Delaware Tech specialty license plate.

The web manager created a series of attractive links to additional opportunities to find out about lifelong learning opportunities, contact the College with updated
information or to get involved by volunteering, and purchase Delaware Tech merchandise from the bookstore.

Features that were retained from the original alumni pages included alumni success stories, transcript requests, information about the alumni association, and a “contact us” link. However, the links to those features were improved as a result of the complete redesign.

Delaware Tech’s alumni portion of the College’s website is now easier to find, easier to navigate, and much more inviting and interactive. I think it will be more effective at engaging alumni and will allow us to promote the success of our alumni and attract them to be more involved with the institution.
References


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Figure 6  Former Delaware Tech Website
Figure 7 Improved Delaware Tech Website
Alumni Association

All graduates of Delaware Technical Community College are members of the College Alumni Association and are welcome to participate in planned activities at any campus regardless of which campus they attended. Contact us, tell us your story and let us know how we can be involved. We want to hear from you!

Dover

Terry Campus Center
Delaware Technical Community College Alumni Association
Gary Rippl - President

Georgetown

Dover Campus Center
Delaware Technical Community College Alumni Association
Danny Watts - President

Stanton/Wilmington

Stanton/L Erie Campus Center
Delaware Technical Community College Alumni Association
Shane Mavness - President
Appendix H

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Curriculum Framing

Alumni engagement is an area that community colleges have historically neglected, but in an era of reduced state and community resources, it has become a priority for many institutions across the nation. Delaware Technical Community College has alumni association chapters at each campus and a college-wide alumni board that includes officers from the campus alumni chapters. With a typical enrollment of approximately 15,000 students per semester, there is an extremely large untapped group of individuals who can be engaged to remain involved in activities at the College once they graduate.

In addition, approximately 50,000 people have graduated from Delaware Tech since it opened its doors in 1967. And, unlike some of the state’s other higher education institutions, 97% of the College’s students are Delawareans who remain in the state once they graduate. Because most graduates are local, they should be engaged to become involved in initiatives to help current students succeed.

There are significant challenges associated with establishing ongoing relationships with community college students, however. Starace (2012) asserts that the
early community college student experience can be described as “transactional” or “nomadic,” and administrators need to learn how to transform the former nomads into alumni “settlers” who will stay connected with and supportive of the institution once they finish their academic program.

I will create a one-day training program for all employees that will inspire them to engage our community college alumni to become involved with the College in order to: serve as role models and mentors for our students to inspire them to complete their degrees; provide internship and networking opportunities; volunteer and support events and activities that raise funds and project a positive image in the community; and act as ambassadors in the community promoting Delaware Tech as a high quality education choice. Delaware Tech’s low graduation rate is similar to most community colleges nationwide, which is the result of the many unique challenges faced by community college students. If alumni were more engaged with the College, it could give students additional support and inspiration to complete their degrees.

The target audience for this training is not just instructors. It is employees in all divisions. While it’s true that instructors experience the most frequent interactions with students, many of our students bond with an academic counselor, a librarian, a tutor, or a financial aid advisor. Therefore, all employees should be involved in this effort. However, since there has not been a strong focus on alumni engagement in the past, this will be a significant change for them. They will not only learn best practices – they will be asked to implement them in their daily interactions with current students and alumni.
The curriculum will be created according to the stages of Understanding by Design written by McTighe and Wiggins (2012). Stage one is to identify desired results, which are listed below:

- Faculty and staff will be informed of best practices to engage alumni. They will learn what other community colleges are doing that are producing successful results and how those colleges and their students are benefiting from alumni engagement.
- Some additional methods shared will come from the pre-training survey of their peers.
- Employees will be inspired to become part of a college-wide effort to engage alumni.
- A new culture that values alumni involvement will be created.
- Following each quarterly assessment, employees will learn what their colleagues are doing that is working well to engage alumni.

Recently, as part of our 50th anniversary celebration, we solicited stories from alumni to upload onto our anniversary website. I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of individuals who took the time to fill out the form that we emailed them. Their stories are inspiring and have been viewed by thousands of visitors to the website in 2016. We should include these stories in the training curriculum as examples of alumni we should engage to be involved with our campus.
Recent changes to the alumni portion of the website included posting 54 alumni profiles, news stories featuring alumni, a calendar of events, and links to engage alumni to update their contact information, volunteer for activities, and purchase Delaware Tech merchandise. The website will be an important tool in alumni engagement, but there is also a need to create an alumni engagement culture at the College.

The professional development will include best practices at engaging our current students to be more involved on campus. One positive example that will be shared is the student involvement in the Starry, Starry Night Gala, an event that raises funds for academic programs and scholarships. Volunteers at the most recent gala included 25 students who served as guest guides in the dining room, ushers in the theater, and coffee and dessert servers at the end-of-evening concert. Virtually all of the volunteers reported that they appreciated being part of the event, and they asked if they could return as volunteers after graduation. This example will be shared along with best practices from other colleges, but employees will also be asked for their ideas about how these kinds of successful efforts can be implemented.

As mentioned in *The Understanding by Design Guide* by Wiggins and McTighe (2011), the curriculum will be designed to first address the questions “Why are we learning this?” and “What will this enable us to accomplish?” Currently, there are a few faculty members who keep in touch with their alumni and bring them in to their classrooms to share their experiences. Most of the previous efforts to identify alumni to present them with awards, invite them to events, or highlight them in our magazine or on our website have involved only instructors. This training will promote equity and fairness
by involving all employees in alumni engagement efforts. As mentioned previously, many members of our staff interact with students, and those relationships should be valued and respected.

This training will also promote equity and fairness related to the alumni we recruit and engage. Historically, the alumni who are highlighted by the College are graduates who have gone on to achieve bachelor’s, master’s, and even doctoral degrees. As a community college, we should also promote the achievements of those who have associate degrees and are contributing to their communities as automotive mechanics, veterinary technicians, physical therapy assistants, and dental hygienists. Participants will be encouraged to reach out to these alumni and highlight them as examples of success. Delaware Tech, like most community colleges, operates primarily under the Social Efficiency ideology mentioned identified by Schiro (2012). Students are taught to perform a variety of technical functions that will help them in their jobs. Learning is hands on with students practicing and mastering skills. We should celebrate their accomplishments as much as we celebrate the students who go on to achieve higher degrees.

Evidence Centered Research

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) serves as the College’s accrediting body. Delaware Tech must achieve a high level of performance related to their standards in order to maintain accreditation.
Standard eight states that “The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students’ educational goals.” There are a number of initiatives the College has undertaken in increase enrollment. Recruiters regularly visit high schools and talk to students about the College’s programs, and open houses are held twice a year to highlight all of the educational opportunities that are available as well as the financial aid resources that exist. There are also initiatives designed to improve retention rates. Some of these include making advisement mandatory in order to register for classes each semester, creating learning communities, and appointing a student success committee that meets regularly to discuss ideas for improving retention and achievement.

Lippencott (2011) asserts that alumni can be an extraordinary resource for marketing the institution to prospective students. He states that “Graduates can serve not only as the ‘poster children’ for the quality of the educational experience but also as an active and extensive sales force.” He also stresses the important roles they can play in tutoring and mentoring students and helping them succeed and that community colleges across the country are not tapping into this vital resource.

Standard nine of the MSCHE’s standards states that “The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution’s goals for students.” There are initiatives in place such as a re-designed New Student Orientation program, Student Success Courses, a Career Services Center, and Service Learning opportunities to meet this standard. Involving our employees in alumni engagement would be an additional initiative that provides student support. Graduates
could be recruited to serve as mentors, tutors, or guest speakers in classrooms to inspire our current students to finish their degrees. They can also be a resource for offering them internship and job opportunities.

This curriculum will be based on all of the key tenets of Understanding by Design recommended by Wiggins and McTighe (2011), but some of these will be more significant. The goal of this training is to develop and deepen understanding by our employees about the importance of alumni engagement and best practices that they can use to contribute toward the effort. It will also be important that employees demonstrate their learning through authentic performance. In addition, the curriculum design will be planned starting with long-term desired results through a three-stage process, and teachers will serve as coaches of understanding as they focus on ensuring learning, not just teaching. The process of learning will be interactive so the teachers will receive feedback throughout the training from participants.

A major goal of this training is to create a community of practice as defined by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015). The community would consist of employees who share the domain of interest in increasing alumni engagement. The intent is that following the training they will engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information related to the common goal. They will also develop a shared repertoire of resources to engage alumni more effectively. This community of practice will have formal and informal elements associated with it. There will be periodic checks on progress that will require formal discussion and analysis, but there will also be less formal information sharing.
The content of the curriculum will also be created according to tenets recommended by Jacobs (2010). It will be necessary to cultivate personal and local perspectives so that each employee can feel the content has relevance to them. This might be challenging for some participants who experience minimal contact with students. They will need to discover how their engagement could be achieved in a different way from a faculty member’s methods. Content will also be developed with an eye to creative and imaginative directions. If the content is stale, no one will be energized to get involved.

Additionally, it will be important to use technology and media so that both active and static materials are used as recommended by Jacobs (2010). But it will be important to use technology in a meaningful way that supports learning and not be used just for the sake of including it. Finally, the content will be matched to the stage of the learner. Our employees would be insulted if the curriculum is presented in a way that is beneath their level. All of the learners in the room know the mission of the College, for instance. It would be insulting to review that with them.

Additionally, there will be portions of the training that will contain elements of constructivism outlined by Brooks and Brooks (2000). It’s important to recognize that some employees are actively engaging alumni already. Others may have creative ideas, but they’ve never been asked to share them. So in order to make the training relevant and valuable, teachers leading the training should allow responses to drive part of the lessons. They should inquire about the employees’ understanding of the concepts before sharing their own opinions. Some might perceive potential challenges that the teachers of the training had not anticipated that might steer the discussion in another way. A dialogue
should be encouraged among the teachers and participants so that the discussion is not just a one-way lecture. Although the training will include presenting some statistics and best practices, everyone will benefit from sharing their own ideas related to the topic.

Other elements that will be important are recommended by Brame (n/d) with regard to the idea of flipping the classroom. It will be valuable to expose employees to the subject matter prior to the day of training. Short videos and articles about successful alumni initiatives at other community colleges will stimulate their thinking and help them arrive at the training with ideas to share. And, although the training will be required of employees, there should be an incentive (some sort of Delaware Tech promotional item perhaps) provided to them if they complete an online survey prior to the training. The survey will provide training leaders with valuable information about what efforts are already happening with regard to alumni engagement. Flipping the classroom will provide participants with knowledge and challenges ahead of time so that they are ready for deeper learning when they arrive at the training session.

Strategies

The timing is actually perfect regarding alignment with learning expectations within the organization. The College’s president, who was appointed in 2014, has implemented a variety of initiatives to support employees and students. Operations have been streamlined, and he has worked to create a culture of innovation.
Regarding policies and practices related to the training, I will incorporate several key elements of differentiated instruction as recommended by Hall, Vue, Strangman, and Meyer (2014) related to the content, process, product, and affect/environment.

With regard to content, a variety of materials will support instruction, which will allow different learners to gain access to the information. As mentioned previously, articles and videos will be emailed ahead of the training. Handouts will be distributed at the training. And content from the training will be uploaded on the College employee portal. The portal postings will be dynamic so that information can be shared after the training is over. Ideas from the group exercises will be posted along with new articles and research on alumni engagement. People will also be able to share their ideas and success stories on Google documents linked from the portal. In addition, the tasks and objectives will be aligned with learning goals. We will not waste time on unnecessary exercises. All of the content will be relevant and applicable to the desired outcomes. And finally, the content will be presented in a way that learners will gain powerful understanding of the key concepts surrounding this alumni engagement initiative.

The training process will involve concepts such as flexible grouping and critical and creative thinking recommended by Hall, Vue, Strangman and Meyer (2014). When we break into small group discussions, participants will not be permitted to form their own groups because teachers will sit with teachers, and staff will choose their close co-workers. Instead, the groups will be chosen creatively to ensure diversity and promote creative thinking. An example would be to group people by the color they’re wearing for one exercise and put them in groups by birthday month for another discussion.
Products will include assessment before, during, and after through pre-training surveys, questions throughout the day, and evaluations and result data after the training. And while I’m hoping to ignite a fire in them and turn them into active explorers, I also know that I have to vary my expectations for different individuals. This type of training and this initiative will not resonate with some employees.

Finally, with regard to environment, I would like to conduct the training in large conference facilities on each campus. These will be optimal locations for more engaged learning because participants will not be in a lecture hall or theater. They will be seated at tables and will have opportunities to discuss concepts with each other and move around when we do exercises in small groups. They will also have an opportunity during the day to choose which breakout session they’d like to attend. This will provide some balance between teacher-selected and student-selected tasks.

It will be important to design training that is presented very clearly to a diverse group of learners as stressed by Gay (2016). Instructors use terminology like “student learning outcomes” and acronyms like “IPEDs.” Human resource professionals have their language, as do graphic designers in the Marketing Department. It will be important for the training to be presented in clear language that everyone will understand no matter what their profession, gender, ethnicity, or points of reference.

Finally, the training will contain elements mentioned by Collins and Halverson (2009) in their article entitled “Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology.” The authors mention incompatibilities between schooling and technology that should be
considered when developing curriculum. Two of their incompatibilities are especially relevant for this training course. The first is “teacher as expert vs. diverse knowledge sources.” Prior to the training, participants will be challenged to bring their own ideas to share regarding alumni engagement. Although the training facilitators will present information on best practices, there will be opportunities to share ideas that employees have gathered from a variety of sources. The other relevant incompatibility that will be addressed is “knowledge in the head vs. reliance on outside resources.” Learners will not be expected to retain everything that is presented or discussed during the day of training. Instead, facilitators and participants will add to that information by providing tips on multiple resources employees can use to contact and engage alumni.

Outcomes and Evaluation

During the month prior to the training, participants will receive one email a week to build anticipation and get them mentally prepared to share ideas. The first email will contain three short articles on successful alumni engagement programs at other community colleges. The second week, they will receive an email with a link to a video about a successful alumni engagement initiative at another community college. The third week will contain a survey about their impressions of what alumni engagement activities are already taking place and what ideas they have to engage alumni. The final email the week before the training will contain a challenge to submit their favorite engagement idea that will be included in the introductory Power Point presentation. There will be College promotional item prizes awarded to those that respond to the survey and the challenge
emails. They will receive a receipt that they can exchange for their prizes on the day of training.

The training will begin with a presentation on best practices by other institutions with regard to alumni engagement. In order to incorporate multiple opportunities to reach different learners, the presentation will include relevant embedded videos, as well as photos and short profiles of alumni featured on the alumni portion of the Delaware Tech website. Existing efforts at Delaware Tech will also be mentioned to give proper credit to those already working to engage alumni.

After a short break, participants will be given the opportunity to attend breakout sessions led by representatives from other community colleges who have successfully engaged alumni in various ways. Participants will choose from breakout sessions on the value and results with regard to engaging:

1. Creating an alumni mentoring program
2. Recruiting guest speakers for the classroom and student events
3. Recruiting students and alumni to volunteer for special events
4. Connecting students to internships and job opportunities with alumni

When participants return to the large conference center, they will be separated into small groups to brainstorm ideas and identify challenges that will have to be overcome. They will write these ideas on a large white pad on an easel and report back to the large group in a de-briefing session.
After lunch there will be a dynamic guest speaker from a successful community college alumni program. I will work with the presenter to make sure it involves multi-media methods to engage the participants. It will end with an opportunity for participants to ask questions.

Following a short break, participants will be separated into small groups that are different from the ones they previously participated in. They will create personal action plans for alumni engagement. They will discuss their plans with the small group members and receive feedback from each other.

Finally, at the end of the day, training facilitators will introduce participants to the alumni engagement portal that they can use as a resource for information. They will be encouraged to report their progress and ideas on the Google documents linked to the site. Then they will be informed of the plans moving forward – the plans for evaluating the results of their efforts and reporting back to them.

An evaluation survey will be sent electronically to all participants to collect their initial assessment of the training. Results of that input will be shared on the portal. And, although this feedback is important, more vital evaluation information will be collected in the weeks and months that follow the training session.

A transformative approach to evaluation recommended by Henderson and Hawthorne (2000) will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum design. Because of the president’s interest in alumni engagement, he will be included in the collaborative process to evaluate the results.
It's also important to identify what questions will be answered in the evaluation process. Those questions include:

1. Has alumni engagement increased? If so, how many alumni have become involved in campus activities? This will be collected from surveys of employees, as well as data collected at events.

2. Have current students become more engaged in events? If so, what is the level of their engagement? It’s important to assess quality of engagement activities in addition to the total number when constructing transformative evaluation. There is a difference between students acting as guest guides at the annual gala and volunteering to stuff a few envelopes. We want them engaged and inspired to remain engaged because they feel like they play a meaningful role.

3. How would the data be gathered and analyzed? With transformative evaluation it’s important to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will illustrate the total number of participants in each area of involvement. Brief, oral surveys of alumni and students at the time of engagement will provide qualitative information.

4. What criteria will be used to interpret and judge data? Transformative evaluation requires us to assess indicators such as balance of alumni engagement between divisions. We will also survey employees four months after the training to assess if the material that was presented contained
appropriate information that has helped them to use critical thinking skills to engage alumni.

5. Who analyzes data and makes judgements on how to proceed? The effectiveness of the training and the follow up will be analyzed by the College’s data analysis expert and presented to the president and vice presidents. The results will then be reported to employees at the quarterly update sessions on each campus. Traditionally, this is where the evaluation would stop, but transformative evaluation recommends that we obtain input from peers at other community colleges who are not intimately involved with our institution.
References


Appendix I

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Issue

Alumni engagement has historically been neglected at community colleges. However, in an era of reduced state and community resources, it is becoming a priority for many institutions. Although there are limited resources to work with, this action plan can be accomplished with existing staff and can help improve success for current students.

The initiatives contained in this action plan were informed by literature on the topic, as well as interviews with subject matter experts, focus groups with Delaware Tech alumni, student surveys, an evaluation of an annual alumni celebration, articles on best practices for college websites, and a review of existing alumni engagement programs.

In addition, it’s important to consider examples of other community colleges who have been successful at engaging alumni in meaningful ways that go beyond donations and events. Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC) created a monthly e-newsletter, established alumni social media channels, asked alumni to attend open houses to share their experiences, and created an alumni ambassador program (Budryk, 2013). Northampton Community College has developed and maintained a strong alumni
program, which includes alumni serving on panels for student events, as well as alumni working as partners with the institution for lobbying and fundraising (Budryk, 2013).

At Delaware Technical Community College, the retention rate for first-time, full-time degree seeking students was 60% from fall 2016 to fall 2017. The retention rate for first-time, part-time degree seeking students was far worse at 37%. While this is not uncommon for community colleges, it is imperative that the College make every effort to improve retention and completion rates. Community college presents challenges that are different from residential four-year institutions. Our students need additional support to succeed. There are programs in place to provide support for needs such as childcare, transportation, financial aid, counseling, learning communities, developmental classes, and tutoring. While there have been many initiatives put in place over the past several years to increase student success, this alumni engagement effort will provide additional support that can motivate and inspire our students to persevere to graduation.

The initiatives were also informed by best practices at other institutions, including the Luoma Leadership Academy at Minnesota State University and Columbus State Community College (CSCC). Both institutions focused on using social media effectively, designing a clear and comprehensive alumni website, increasing communication with graduates, and engaging alumni to participate in meaningful ways. The CSCC report also recommended establishing a cross-department steering committee to focus on alumni engagement (Team Mauritius, 2012).
Delaware Tech currently approaches a few alumni each year to tell their inspirational stories at events such as donor luncheons. While this serves to motivate donors, opportunities should be expanded to include more students who could benefit from listening to these graduates who persevered through obstacles and achieved their degrees.

The 2016 effort to reach out to alumni in order to provide stories on the 50th anniversary micro-site revealed that our graduates have diverse experiences they were eager to share. In fact, the 50th anniversary micro-site followed best practices to attract alumni more than the Delaware Tech website, which, until it was revised recently, had a minimal amount of alumni information and was accessed by using two links from the home page - “About” and then “Giving.”

The website redesign is an example of an initiative that’s already been completed. The first major change was providing alumni with a direct link from the College’s home page. Then, when a user gets to the main alumni page, the old photo of graduates was replaced with a new, more engaging photo. The message under the photo was also changed from one that conveyed the mission of the alumni association to a more welcoming message that encourages alumni to get involved and share their stories. There is also an attractive link at the top that encourages alumni to update their contact information, learn more about the College’s initiatives, volunteer at a campus event, or share their story.
Two videos of alumni in their workplaces talking about their Delaware Tech experiences were placed on the page, and a link to the alumni magazine was more prominently placed. The alumni home page also now contains three recent news stories featuring alumni, and there is an opportunity to link to “Alumni News,” which contains many alumni stories and photos. The same is true for the “Alumni Success Stories,” which are profile stories written about alumni from a variety of academic programs. There are four featured on the alumni home page, but the user can follow a link to 54 alumni profiles.

Another new feature is an alumni event calendar. Users can find information about events such as 5K races, distinguished alumni celebrations, donor luncheons, and galas at each campus. Items on the calendar contain basic information about each event, and alumni can obtain more information or register for an event by using the links in the calendar.

Previously, alumni benefits were listed on the alumni home page. They are still listed, but users can use a new link to access additional alumni benefits on a page that includes information about scholarships, career services, and transcripts, as well as information about how to purchase a Delaware Tech specialty license plate.

The web manager created a series of attractive links to additional opportunities to find out about lifelong learning opportunities, contact the College with updated information or to get involved by volunteering, and purchase Delaware Tech merchandise from the bookstore.
Features that were retained from the original alumni pages included alumni success stories, transcript requests, information about the alumni association, and a “contact us” link. However, the links to those features were improved as a result of the complete redesign.

Delaware Tech’s alumni portion of the College’s website is now easier to find, easier to navigate, and much more inviting and interactive. I think it will be more effective at engaging alumni and will allow us to promote the success of our alumni and attract alumni to be more involved with the institution.

While the website is an important tool to engage alumni, additional initiatives should be implemented. The College should attempt to achieve the benefits identified in the CSCC report including having enhanced visibility of alumni on campus, alumni serving as speakers for student events and in classrooms, increased networking opportunities for students, a mentoring program to help students succeed, and enhanced alumni engagement that fosters a sense of loyalty, financial support, and advocacy.

Initiative #1  Create and Implement an Alumni Social Media Plan

A social media plan that is targeted at engaging alumni will be created and implemented. A team made up of the public relations managers from each campus and the director of strategic communication from the Office of the President will create a plan for incorporating alumni profiles, information, and interactive opportunities on the College’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn platforms. Content will be developed and distributed with alumni as the target.
For example, the College’s Facebook page, which is typically followed by current students, will contain information that alumni care about. Posts will be created to remind alumni that they can receive help from the Career Services Center on each campus with things like resume writing, interview techniques, and job openings. Posts will let them know about what’s happening at the College - if a new coffee shop opens on a campus, if a library is renovated, or an energy learning lab is completed. An email will be sent to a list that was compiled by the Development Division to alumni inviting them to follow Delaware Tech’s social media channels.

The College’s Twitter feed will tweet articles on industry changes, employment trends, new technology, and positive articles from magazines or newspapers that mention Delaware Tech graduates. It can also be a tool to alert graduates about companies new to Delaware that will be hiring employees.

Instagram can also be used to connect with graduates. Photos of campus events, student activities, faculty, and campus renovations could bring back memories for people who want to be reminded of their experiences at Delaware Tech. Instagram is different in that it allows for quick communication with images instead of written information that some alumni might not take the time to read. In other words, it provides a quick and easy alternative to the Facebook and Twitter pages.

You Tube will be used to house videos that profile alumni and provide information about academic programs, lifelong learning opportunities, and workforce training. Currently, the College has produced several videos, but many more will be
produced that allow viewers to see our graduates in their work environment and hear about the important role that Delaware Tech has played in their lives.

LinkedIn will be the most important tool for alumni engagement. Graduates can identify Delaware Tech in their educational profile and then receive targeted posts that let them know about alumni engagement efforts. When the College hosted its first major alumni engagement event in November, 2017, a LinkedIn advertising campaign was successful at reaching alumni and gaining their interest. The event was well attended by alumni of all ages and academic majors (see Table 6).

Initiative #2 Create a College-wide Alumni Engagement Task Force

A task force should be appointed and charged with increasing alumni engagement in events involving prospective and current students. The group should include representatives from all divisions, but should be led by the deans of student affairs and include significant representation from faculty from the Instruction Division because they tend to have stronger relationships with the students than employees in other roles. Other divisions represented should include Development, Strategic Communication, Information and Instructional Technology, and Workforce Development and Community Education.

The task force will be presented with information from research, but will also be tasked with collecting information and ideas from other community colleges. They will then create a strategic plan aimed at engaging alumni in meaningful ways that help existing students, such as having them speak in classrooms or events on campus,
participate in 5k races and other fundraising events, volunteer for student events such as open house and new student orientation, and act as mentors for our students. There will be other ideas for engagement that will likely come from the information gathered by task force members, so the ones that are approved will be part of the strategic plan as well.

This group will meet monthly as they collect additional ideas, create the plan, implement the plan, and collect preliminary evaluation of the efforts. Once the outreach efforts are in place and working, the task force will become the Alumni Engagement Committee and meet every other month. Members will be appointed for one-year, two-year, or three-year terms. When new members are selected, they will be appointed for three-year terms. This will allow the committee to get new members without everyone leaving at once (see Table 7).

Initiative #3  Conduct Professional Development in Alumni Engagement

Once the strategic plan has been created, the task force will be responsible for implementing the professional development action plan contained in artifact 8 of this ELP in order to communicate the importance of alumni involvement and to engage their participation in outreach efforts. All employees will be invited to attend the training, but participation will be optional.

The training will begin with a presentation on best practices by other institutions with regard to alumni engagement. In order to incorporate multiple opportunities to reach different learners, the presentation will include relevant embedded videos, as well as photos and short profiles of alumni featured on the alumni portion of the Delaware Tech
website. Existing efforts at Delaware Tech will also be mentioned to give proper credit to those already working to engage alumni.

Participants will be given the opportunity to attend breakout sessions led by representatives from other community colleges who have successfully engaged alumni in various ways. Additionally, there will be brainstorming sessions in small groups, a dynamic guest speaker from a successful community college alumni program, and an activity where participants will create personal action plans for alumni engagement. At the end of the training session, facilitators will introduce participants to the alumni engagement portal that they can use as a resource for information. They will be encouraged to report their progress and ideas on the Google documents linked to the site (see Table 8).

Initiative #4 Host Alumni Events

Celebrations should be hosted on all campuses that highlight alumni. Current students who were surveyed after attending two different Distinguished Alumni Celebrations reported overwhelmingy that they were inspired by listening to the honorees. Distinguished Alumni Celebrations should be held annually at each campus location and honor at least two graduates. Students from those academic programs should be invited to attend the luncheons for free. Other celebrations like donor luncheons should highlight successful alumni.

Additional events should be hosted for alumni to attend and bring a guest. An example of a very successful one was the College’s recent reception at Camden Yards.
The venue was chosen because the head groundskeeper at the stadium is a graduate of Delaware Tech’s Turf Management program. She and her colleagues provided tours of the facility followed by a reception. This event was exceptionally planned by the College’s Development Division, and other opportunities like this one can be identified and implemented.

The College should also create and communicate opportunities for alumni to receive professional development and career services assistance. This is especially relevant for recent alumni, but should include all graduates because some may be interested in changing careers or refreshing their skills in areas like resume writing or interviewing.

Delaware Tech should host networking events for alumni to meet students in their academic area. Current students could benefit from talking with graduates in their field of study. They can gain information about their future careers and benefit from the experience of alumni. Students can learn about internship or job opportunities. Alumni and current students expressed an interest in networking events on surveys and in focus groups (see Table 9).

Finally, since the College just celebrated its 50th anniversary, Delaware Tech should invite alumni from the first graduating class from 1969, to attend a reception and be part of the commencement processional. The University of Delaware does this annually with the 50th reunion class, and it’s extremely popular and meaningful according to Lauren Murray Simione, associate vice president for alumni engagement and annual
giving. Delaware Tech included one graduate from each decade in one of its 2016 commencement ceremonies, and the individuals who participated expressed appreciation at being included. Most of them had not worn regalia for a very long time, and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

These are just a few of the events that alumni can be invited to participate in. Additional opportunities should be considered at the campus and college-wide level for meaningful involvement from alumni.
## Table 6

**Initiative #1: Create and Implement an Alumni Social Media Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Implementation Strategies</th>
<th>Measures of Success</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Group Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet to discuss ideas and charge team members to collect information on best practices.</td>
<td>Director of strategic communication and PR managers will investigate alumni engagement on social media channels at other community colleges.</td>
<td>Information is compiled about what other institutions are doing with alumni via social media.</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
<td>Director of strategic communication and PR managers from each campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a social media plan for alumni engagement.</td>
<td>Create the plan and present it to President’s Council, which includes all vice presidents and the president of the College.</td>
<td>A draft of an Alumni Social Media Plan is provided and presented to President’s Council members for their consideration.</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
<td>Director of strategic communication and PR managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect input from College leadership.</td>
<td>President’s Council members have the opportunity to comment on the plan.</td>
<td>Council members offer input on the plan.</td>
<td>April 1 – 15, 2018</td>
<td>President’s Council provides comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement the Alumni Social Media Plan</td>
<td>Managers will implement the plan</td>
<td>Social media posts</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
<td>PR managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Implementation Strategies</td>
<td>Measures of Success</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Group Members</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite alumni to follow the College’s social media channels.</td>
<td>Emails will be sent to all alumni inviting them to follow the College’s social media</td>
<td>Data on traffic on Facebook, total numbers of followers on Twitter and Instagram, and total of members on LinkedIn</td>
<td>Email sent on May 15, 2018</td>
<td>Development Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain the Social Media effort with meaningful content that alumni will want to be informed about.</td>
<td>Alumni content on social media will be maintained on a daily basis so that it’s relevant and responsive to followers.</td>
<td>Facebook data and numbers of followers on Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn will continue to be monitored and documented.</td>
<td>June 2018 – December 2018</td>
<td>PR managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report the progress of the social media effort and any additional plans.</td>
<td>A Power Point presentation will be created and presented to President’s Council to report the progress of the initiative.</td>
<td>The PowerPoint presentation, which will contain data from all of the media channels and examples of two-way communication with alumni.</td>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td>Director of strategic communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Implementation Strategies</td>
<td>Measures of Success</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Group Members</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a college-wide Alumni Engagement Task Force.</td>
<td>Employees are appointed to serve on the Alumni Engagement Task Force.</td>
<td>Administrators make recommendations, and an email is sent to people who have been appointed.</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
<td>Representatives from all divisions of the College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information already collected on best practices to the task force, and begin to collect additional information.</td>
<td>Task force members are charged with examining best practices from other community colleges.</td>
<td>Input on a spreadsheet accessible to all members</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share information collected by the task force.</td>
<td>The task force meets and shares ideas, which are compiled into a preliminary report of ideas.</td>
<td>A preliminary report of ideas and minutes from the two meetings</td>
<td>April 1, 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a draft strategic plan for increasing meaningful alumni engagement with current students.</td>
<td>The draft strategic plan is written and reviewed by the task force.</td>
<td>A draft of an Alumni Engagement Strategic Plan</td>
<td>April 15, 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Implementation Strategies</td>
<td>Measures of Success</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Group Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>The strategic plan is presented to President’s Council</td>
<td>The plan will be given to the president and President’s Council so they can review it and provide their comments. A Power Point presentation containing the highlights will also be presented.</td>
<td>The draft plan, Power Point presentation, and comments from leadership</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Task Force, President’s Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic plan is finalized incorporating feedback from leadership.</td>
<td>The plan will be finalized and made available to the college community.</td>
<td>The final strategic plan</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alumni Engagement Task Force becomes the Alumni Engagement Committee.</td>
<td>The committee is formally renamed and tasked with carrying out the initiatives in the Alumni Engagement Strategic Plan. Evaluation will take place at the end of the spring semester.</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee roster and final Alumni Engagement Strategic Plan</td>
<td>August 15, 2018 – June 15, 2019</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8

**Initiative #3 Conduct Professional Development in Alumni Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Implementation Strategies</th>
<th>Measures of Success</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Group Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop curriculum for one day of training</td>
<td>Use the curriculum plan in artifact 8 to develop the training.</td>
<td>A professional development curriculum</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm dates and reserve rooms at all campus locations.</td>
<td>Work with campus directors to determine the best date to conduct training.</td>
<td>A schedule for training statewide</td>
<td>July 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee and campus directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm guest speakers</td>
<td>Determine final agenda for the training.</td>
<td>A final training agenda</td>
<td>August 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicize training to employees.</td>
<td>Send email to employees from the college president</td>
<td>Employees send responses that they will attend the training.</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee and Marketing and PR Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct training sessions.</td>
<td>Host training sessions at all campus locations.</td>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee and Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect evaluation responses.</td>
<td>Email a Qualtrics survey to attendees.</td>
<td>Evaluation results</td>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>Alumni Engagement Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide follow-up information.</td>
<td>Post follow-up information on the portal.</td>
<td>Employee interaction</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>Development Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives #4  Host Alumni Events</td>
<td>Implementation Strategies</td>
<td>Measures of Success</td>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Group Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Distinguished Alumni Celebrations at each campus.</td>
<td>Collect nominees and select honorees.</td>
<td>Students, employees, and friends of the College attend.</td>
<td>October 2018</td>
<td>Development Division and Alumni Association chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a calendar of special alumni events.</td>
<td>Brainstorm ideas for alumni events similar to the recent Camden Yards tour and reception.</td>
<td>A schedule of alumni events for the 2018 – 2019 school year</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>Development Division and Alumni Association Board Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a calendar of networking events for alumni and current students.</td>
<td>Create a schedule of networking events where alumni can meet students in their former academic programs.</td>
<td>A schedule of networking events for the 2018 – 2019 school year</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>Deans of Student Affairs and Deans of Instruction from each campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer career services to alumni.</td>
<td>Communicate with alumni about opportunities for career services assistance.</td>
<td>A campaign that includes social media and emails</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>Deans of Student Affairs and Marketing and PR Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host a 50th reunion reception and invite them to participate in graduation.</td>
<td>Invite 1969 graduates to participate in a reception and carry a banner in the procession at commencement.</td>
<td>Participation by 50th reunion graduates</td>
<td>May 2019 and every year after that</td>
<td>Graduation Committees on each campus and Development Division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


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and service across generations. Columbus, OH: 2012 Leadership Institute, Columbus State Community College.
Appendix J

IRB/HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL
DATE: April 20, 2017

TO: Christine Gillan, Ed.D.
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [1060429-1] Evaluation of Delaware Tech's Distinguished Alumni Celebration

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: April 20, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (2)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.
DATE: September 8, 2017

TO: Christine Gillan
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [1123008-1] Alumni Engagement Subject Matter Expert Interview Questions

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: September 8, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (2)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

CC:
DATE: June 6, 2017

TO: Christine Gillan, Ed.D.
FROM: University of Delaware IRB (HUMANS)

STUDY TITLE: [1082714-1] Alumni Engagement Student Survey

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: June 6, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (2)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for the research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

cc:
DATE:        June 6, 2017

TO:          Christine Gillan
FROM:        University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [1082713-1] Alumni Engagement Focus Groups
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION:      DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:  June 6, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (2)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.