

Building Alumni Associations at Comprehensive Community Colleges: Turning Association Members into Future College Donors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to an article from 2006 in the Chronicle of Higher Education, *Why are Community Colleges so Slow to Jump on the Fund-Raising Bandwagon*, written by Donald C. Summers, community colleges serve nearly half of the undergraduates in the country, including first-generation, and minority students, but they receive maybe 2 percent of the financial gifts made to higher education. Community colleges face many obstacles in building alumni donor bases because many two-year college graduates transfer to a four-year institution and the alum's loyalty lies with that institution. The need to raise funds is relatively new for most community colleges that have not yet developed and sustained an active alumni association. However, according to Rebecca Rump with Southeastern Community College in Iowa, alums add value to community colleges. While four-year institutions rely on their alumni primarily for monetary support, alums of community colleges are, among other things, part of program curriculum advisory committees, employers of graduates, employees of the college, taxpayers and voters. Therefore, it is important to recognize the value of alums to the college.

Our group was charged with providing recommendations and guidance for Minnesota State Community and Technical College (MSCTC) and recently branded as M State, in developing a three-year business plan for an alumni association with the goal of turning association members into future college donors. The college currently has four separate campus foundations as well as the M State Foundation. However, none of the campuses have an active alumni association. MSCTC – Moorhead campus is in the initial stages of developing an alumni association, and the dean of students has drafted by-laws and a constitution. Our group conducted surveys of affected constituents to determine interest in alumni activities, and conducted national research to identify best practices of alumni associations around the country.

Our team surveyed the MSCTC faculty, a random sampling of 100 alumni, and the two-year development directors within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. We received 22 faculty responses to an e-mail survey, 10 student responses from a mailed survey, and 11 responses to an email questionnaire from the system's two-year development directors.

We have determined that it is critical for a successful alumni association to have adequate funding, personnel and organizational buy-in. Through the research done regarding best practices, we determined the fundamental components of a successful alumni association include:

- Web site and social networking
- Print communication; newsletter, magazine
- Alumni networking
- Alumni services
- Fundraising

In conclusion, we are making the following six recommendations to Minnesota State Community and Technical College to address the challenge of creating an alumni association:

- Conduct self-study to determine commitment in building an alumni association
- Determine the organizational structure; remain under the college's umbrella or be coupled with the existing foundation associations
- Establish a formal alumni association for M State
- Build a strategic plan
 - Develop a shared vision and mission statement
 - Develop by-laws
 - Develop goals and objectives for working with alumni
- Create a web site that will support alumni participation
- Establish criteria for future administrative hiring to include fundraising experience

Leadership Lessons Learned

Throughout this process our group learned leadership lessons that will help us work on similar team projects in the future. The biggest lesson we learned was how to communicate effectively between group members geographically dispersed around the state. Our group was uncertain at the onset as to the charge, and we learned it's important to seek clarity about the scope and intent of the project at the beginning.

Most importantly, what each team member brought to the group provided for different perspectives and enhanced the experience. Even though our team consisted of only four members, and one of those members was an action learning coach charged with facilitating the group, we were able to make everything work due to the diverse backgrounds of our team, which included administrative, political, marketing, business, counseling and law enforcement. Our team learned that face-to-face communication was the most effective mode of communication, and ITV and conference calls were not nearly as effective.

Project Members

Janet Blixt, Lake Superior College

Lisa Bottem, Northland Community and Technical College

Melissa Fahning, Office of the Chancellor

Richard Kangas, Central Lakes College

Executive Sponsor

Ann Valentine, President, Minnesota State Community and Technical College

Team Advisor

Patricia Wilber, Vice President for Advancement, Minnesota State Community and Technical College