

Building Business Relationships Through Strategic Alumni Development

Executive Summary

Our team was charged with assisting North Hennepin Community College (NHCC) in developing systems for engaging alumni, specifically for the purpose of building relationships between the college and the business community. Our team determined that in order to achieve that goal, the College would need to have a strong framework on which to build an alumni program. Based on research of effective community college alumni programs and our understanding of the NHCC campus climate related to alumni, we reframed the problem as: *“NHCC is challenged with finding a system that supports the foundation and engages its alumni.”*

Through our research, including a review of the 2009-10 Luoma project commissioned by M-State, “Building Alumni Associations at Comprehensive Community Colleges: Turning Association Members into Future College Donors,” the team learned that a focus on alumni by community colleges is generally a recent phenomenon. Not only are community college alumni programs relatively young, they are also often minimally staffed and funded.

An internal scan of the College community illustrated some of the challenges in developing an alumni program. Although many departments and faculty keep in close touch with their own graduates, there is not a systematic method for tracking alumni. Within the College there is not a uniform understanding of where alumni should “live,” or what their roles should be.

Based on our research, we came up with several recommendations to help NHCC move forward with its alumni plan with a goal of having a launch in time for its 50th Anniversary in 2016. Some of our recommendations are quite specific, such as joining the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE); while others are more wide-reaching, such as launching a comprehensive alumni marketing campaign in time for the anniversary.

We concluded our process with an appreciation for the strength of NHCC and the devotion of its faculty and staff to the students and community. We maintained our project throughout the year with in-person and phone meetings. Even though one of our team left MnSCU for another college in a different state, she was able to continue her participation. Although it was challenging to fit our project into already busy schedules, with the support of our team coach, we kept on track and feel proud about the results of our project.

Team Members:

Gretchen Biesanz, Winona State University
Michelle Goode, North Hennepin Community College (coach)
Laura Savin, Saint Paul College
Mary Tosch, Bemidji State University (Waubonsee Community College)

Executive Sponsors:

John O’Brien, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs
Lisa Larson, Acting President, North Hennepin Community College

Team Advisor:

Jennifer Summer Lambrecht, Foundation Executive Director, North Hennepin Community College
Landon Pirijs, Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, North Hennepin Community College