Alumni Relations and Development

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UTEP is dedicated to developing strong relationships with its alumni, supporters and friends. This committee was charged with recommending new platforms and channels that will allow us to effectively communicate UTEP’s message to all our various constituencies, including El Paso alumni, Mexican alumni and alumni in other regions of the U.S. It was also to determine fund-raising platforms and strategies, as well as a timeline and goals for the Centennial Campaign.
Introduction

The committee was charged with reviewing the activities of two important units in the Office of Institutional Advancement—Alumni Relations and Development—and making recommendations to optimize the work of these units to further UTEP’s academic mission and priorities. The committee found that two of the most pressing challenges are reaching multigenerational alumni and raising money to support all University programs.

Because of decreased financial support from the state legislature, it is essential to expand and increase support for University operations from alumni, community leaders, other individuals, corporations, foundations, and civic organizations, in terms of both financial contributions and the commitment of volunteer time. The Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA) is responsible for creating and advancing initiatives that forge a deep connection between UTEP’s message of “access and excellence” and key audiences and University constituencies, encouraging increased support of University departments and overall institutional objectives. Within OIA, Alumni Relations and Development create different appeals to and ways of approaching such key audiences.

To complete its assignment, the committee reviewed pertinent documentation and became well informed about the functions and responsibilities of the Alumni Relations Office/Alumni Association and the Development Office. After this review, two subcommittees were formed to review, evaluate, and provide recommendations for each of these units. After the two subgroups shared their information, an overall report was produced.

Alumni Relations Office and the Alumni Association

In 1999, the University’s Alumni Association (AA) submitted a proposal to the Alumni Relations Office (ARO) identifying ways in which both entities could work more closely with one another and develop a shared vision. Key components of this plan, which was approved by UTEP’s President Dr. Diana Natalicio included:

- Improving the long-term infrastructure for partnership between the ARO and AA to ensure the continuity of strategic planning and the implementation of all programs.
- Maintaining ongoing alumni programs.
- Establishing a dues-paying organization.
- Creating outreach programs (e.g., chapters, affinity groups).
- Evolving the Alumni Association into an organization that would be capable of financially sustaining all ongoing and future programs and activities.
- Establishing an initial three-year joint agreement among the ARO, AA, and UTEP that would outline financial contributions from the University to complete the ARO/AA goals as outlined in the plan.

The creators of this plan perceived it to be a living document that would be reviewed annually and modified based upon new opportunities and challenges. Furthermore, all of the partners...
involved in this endeavor strongly agreed that it was essential for the University to establish and maintain closer ties with entering students and alumni throughout their lifetimes. The committee believes that working with these constituencies will help build the future donor base needed to support all University programs.

The committee recognizes the outstanding work accomplished by the Alumni Association and its board when they decided to become a dues-paying organization. Based upon its current activity level, the Association is positioning itself to become a major resource for the University. As of March 2005, the Alumni Association had 2,706 dues-paying members, including 494 lifetime members and 2,212 annual dues-paying members. In addition, the Association provides a one-year complimentary membership to recent graduates and has implemented a system to convert them into dues-paying members.

The Alumni Board of Directors is responsible for the oversight of all Alumni Association activities. The seven-member Executive Committee (the president; the president-elect; the vice presidents for ways and means, membership, and public relations; the treasurer; and the secretary) oversees all Board activities and budget allocations and recommends actions to the Board.

Since the implementation of the 1999 Strategic Plan, major milestones have been accomplished. In FY 2000-01, the Alumni Association relied on UTEP to provide 37 percent of the income for programs and events. By 2003-04, the Association was able to fully support such activities. Because of the establishment of a dues-paying organization in 2000 and the generation of revenue through several affinity programs, the Alumni Association has built its revenue base to $200,000 to support and expand various programs and events, including Homecoming, class reunions, awards programs (Distinguished Alumni, Top Ten Seniors), athletic events (pre-game parties in various cities), and special events (Season of Lights). In addition, the Association has enhanced its efforts to build an Endowed Scholarship Fund, whose current market value is $232,000.

The Alumni Relations Office (ARO) oversees all alumni programming for the University. An integral role of this office is to assist the Alumni Association in the conceptualization and implementation of its goals and activities. Additionally, Alumni Relations provides a coordinating role with the Development Office by identifying, cultivating, and engaging alumni and friends in helping build the donor base for the University. The Alumni Relations Office is under the direction of an assistant vice president for Institutional Advancement charged with the supervision of all University alumni-related functions. The office has five full-time employees who are responsible for outreach.
activities, reunions (Homecoming, class, chapter and affinity reunions), awards programs (Distinguished Alumni, Gold Nuggets, Top Ten Seniors), and Alumni Association programming, including membership and chapter development. One individual receives minimal compensation from the AA to direct its Movin’ Miners travel program.

Over the past five years, the ARO and the Alumni Association have worked diligently to create chartered chapters in various regions across the country, including El Paso, Denver, Austin, Dallas, Houston, the San Francisco Bay Area, Juárez, and Chihuahua, Mexico. Affinity-based chapters have also evolved, including graduates of the Law School Preparation Institute and the Master’s Program in Public Administration (MPA). Other informal groups are found in San Antonio, New York, Hartford, Las Vegas (NV), and Washington, DC.

The ARO is the link between the AA and the University’s academic and campus-wide departments and programs. It will continue to facilitate interfaces between the AA and the various advisory councils, fundraising activities, and events sponsored by all University units. The Alumni database is maintained by the OIA Administrative Services unit. It contains information on alumni, friends of the University, donors, corporations, and foundations. There are currently 86,716 alumni in the database, with data on graduates, non-graduates, and scholarship students. The database includes current, reliable addresses for 93 percent (80,785) of the total.

Recent successes of the Intercollegiate Athletics Department (e.g., EV1.NET Houston Bowl game appearance by the football team; an appearance in the NCAA tournament by the men’s basketball team; conference championships or high conference placements in men’s and women’s track and women’s soccer; consistent national rankings for the women’s rifle team; and all-time attendance records at sporting events) have furthered alumni connections with the University. The recent move to Conference USA will provide the University with increased opportunities to compete in front of the large alumni bases located in Houston and Dallas.

**Development**

The University’s Development Office is responsible for non-research, private source fundraising. Within the structure of Institutional Advancement, the Development Office is the main fundraising unit. The office has 10 full-time employees, seven of whom are focused on individual giving. One employee is responsible for planned giving, while two employees cover corporate/foundation giving.

The Committee analyzed various donation levels and found that in the three years between 1994 and 1996, the Development Office raised approximately $8.9 million annually. Beginning in 2002, the amount grew to $16.3 annually, an 83 percent increase. In the past three years, there has been an impressive increase of 350 first-time gifts from alumni. The Development Office has introduced objective performance standards for gift officers to track donor contacts and proposal submissions.

The largest capital improvement program in UTEP’s history (totaling more than $45 million) is currently underway. Included in this program are a new engineering building, a bioscience research building, a new academic services building, and a softball field. Private donations have been an integral part of this program.

With annual research expenditures of more than $30 million, UTEP is continuing to establish itself as a research institution. Private foundations have contributed greatly to this effort. For example, the University received major grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Kauffman Foundation totaling more than $7 million.
UTEP has made significant progress in private gift donations in the past 15 years. The University employs a balanced approach to fundraising, including direct mail, telephone calling, grant writing, major gift cultivation, and planned giving. Structurally, the Development Office is a hybrid, being partly college- or program-based and partly centralized. In its report last year on UTEP’s research capability, the Washington Advisory Group acknowledged that UTEP’s development effort “has been surprisingly successful . . . considering the relatively depressed state of the regional economy.”

Recently, the University has been faced with mounting challenges with respect to state funding. The Texas Legislature decreased UTEP’s funding by $8.5 million (11.5%) for the 2003-04 fiscal year, and further reductions are likely. Confronted by many pressing societal issues, the Legislature is unlikely to increase its funding to keep pace with the University’s enrollment growth, further increasing the importance of Development to UTEP’s future success.

Recommendations

- The committee strongly believes that UTEP cannot reach its maximum potential without the active involvement, participation, and commitment of its alumni. Alumni are major stakeholders in the well-being of our University. They are the representatives of the University in all walks of life, they are advocates for the University, and they are our only lifelong constituency. Alumni are our University’s greatest single resource, and organizing UTEP alumni into a constructive and cohesive force is essential for UTEP’s continuing development.
- The committee recommends that the organizational infrastructure and resource management of the ARO and AA focus on programs, services, and volunteer opportunities that respond effectively to the needs of alumni and students. Both entities must offer programs and services at key points in the “student-to-alumni” lifecycle to encourage lifelong connections to the UTEP community, creating active pathways for a deeper commitment and support for the University.
- The University must begin preparing for its next capital campaign, which should have a goal of raising more than $200 million. In order to do this, the Committee recommends the creation of a long-range strategic planning task force to develop a fundraising model that will support future academic and athletic plans. This 12- to 24-month process should serve as a precursor to campaign organization. The strategic plan should include staffing recommendations, the possibility of involving University staff members outside of the Development Office, alumni database management practices, and travel and training needs.
- The University must continue to develop innovative ways of communicating with its alumni. In addition to getting involved for individual and/or social connections, today’s alumni expect the University to focus on lifelong learning opportunities, health and fitness interests, and family issues. The committee also recognizes the growing impact of the Internet and other virtual services on how we serve, support, and communicate with alumni, students, friends, donors, and funding sources. Thus, current communication strategies (e.g., postcards, NOVA, Horizons, e-mails, etc.) must be continually reviewed to ensure that they are the best means to communicate with all constituencies. In addition, pioneering educational programs should be considered such as an alumni college (e.g., development of lifelong learning projects by partnering groups such as the Alumni Relations Office, the Alumni Association, the Professional and Continuing Education Office, and Career Services). The committee believes that future success in engaging and involving alumni hinges on the University’s ability to communicate with and serve students and alumni with diverse interests, needs, and backgrounds.
- The committee recognizes that in the next eight years there will be more than 20,000 UTEP graduates. Thus, both the ARO and the AA must continue their efforts to encourage participation by students and graduates in alumni-related activities. Both entities should set goals that focus on programs, services, and volunteer opportunities that respond most effectively to alumni and students as a way of retaining graduates in the Alumni Association. To properly capture and track these graduates, better IT tools and research capabilities must be developed. This population is extremely mobile and can easily be lost if the University does not continually keep active e-mail accounts. The University must ensure that resources are available to support this task, since keeping track of recent graduates, retaining their interest in the University, and enabling them to understand University improvements will pay huge dividends as they mature and advance in the workplace.
- In conjunction with the Alumni Association, the Alumni Relations Office and the Development Office should conduct surveys of and focus interviews with alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the University to determine the most effective communication media and messages. This study should include suggestions for segmenting the population groups mentioned above, developing measures for analyzing the effectiveness of a particular communication campaign, and determining if the communication styles being employed create an emotional link to our audience.
- The Alumni Association must review its current board structure to determine if it can meet the changing needs of the University. Since UTEP’s colleges and the athletic department are interested in establishing closer ties to the Association, active committees below the board level may need to be formed. The integration of the Alumni Association into the fabric of the University will strengthen both the Association and the University. Alumni want to participate more heavily within the University and offer their services to various colleges and programs. As alumni become more closely tied to the University, semi-annual meetings among the Alumni Association’s Board of Directors, the various chapter presidents, and UTEP’s president are needed to
Developing excitement and interest in supporting UTEP begins even before students graduate, committee members say.

- The committee supports the efforts of the Alumni Relations Office and the Alumni Association to develop a major scholarship program to support students in their educational endeavors. Financial assistance by the Association and its chartered chapters is an effective way to impact a student’s life by encouraging academic excellence, recognizing achievement, and encouraging perseverance. This type of support also encourages students to value the importance of giving back to other students and the University.

- The committee believes that with the continued identification and cultivation of alumni, the present facility (the de Wetter Center) will not be able to accommodate the increased number of alumni and the growing expansion of alumni activities. Thus, the committee strongly recommends that a new alumni facility (center) be built within the next 10 years. This new alumni center should be located in an area that provides easy access for alumni and friends who are seeking information about the University and alumni activities and who are interested in participating in varied alumni programs.