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Alumni Engagement Working Group Recommendations:

December 2012

Summary of Meetings and Open Forums:

The Alumni Engagement Working Group met three times (October 3rd, November 14th and December 5th) and held two open forums (October 10th and November 28th).

Alumni Engagement Charge Questions and Conclusions:

- 1. As the oldest and largest university in San Diego, the university has over 275,000 alumni. Many of these alumni are prominent community leaders in the region and across the nation. Moreover, our alumni participate extensively in university events, especially athletics. At the same time, our alumni annual giving rates are relatively low. What initiatives can we pursue to strengthen our alumni network and increase annual giving?**

The feedback from the open forums and working group members suggest that the challenges regarding low annual giving rates are more a result of SDSU's "state supported" history than being born from a lack of appreciation for the education. Accordingly the consensus is that this challenge is best tackled with education, messaging and systematic implementation of "asking" mechanisms. It is imperative that SDSU keep current with emerging technologies which facilitate giving and that we utilize social media to market and encourage giving. Finally, the current efforts and messaging regarding "Every Aztec, Any Amount, Every Year", including the goal of increasing the percentage of annual alumni giving from 2.5% to 7.5% in three years, should continue full bore.

- 2. Great universities create powerful networks in which university alumni support each other professionally. This approach helps students obtain employment and alumni prosper in their professional pursuits. What initiatives can we pursue to support the development of networks that will support the "Aztec Family"?**

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SDSU has the appropriate framework for this in Career Services. In order to continue to create the development of networks to support the Aztec Family, the mentorship and internship programs along with a more engaged alumni base needs to be strengthened. This in turn will produce a stronger more powerful infrastructure for SDSU and corporate relations.

Themes:

- SDSU needs to engage alumni in multiple ways--not simply asking for money.
- Capitalize on alumni/student affinities (leverage the vast quantity of student interest in clubs and organizations to alumni who shared those areas of interest as students).
- In addition to building Aztec pride and loyalty amongst students, SDSU should also build a culture of philanthropy and instill the ideal “Every Aztec, Any Amount, Every Year”.
- Re-educate alumni to become annual donors—even if they are already “Aztecs For Life” (alumni association lifetime members).
- Continue to be generous to alumni lifetime members with incentives. At the same time, continue delivering the message that philanthropy is an expectation –and that the only benefits of giving are satisfaction of impacting student success and SDSU, and a tax deduction.
- Current students have strong school pride, which is well engendered systematically by Student Affairs and its campus partners via New Student Orientation, Welcome Week, Aztec Nights and clubs and organizations. The Alumni Association’s partnership with Student Affairs in such things as Templo del Sol has had a strong impact on student loyalty. Current students can be taught to “give back.”

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- Career Services has sophisticated programs designed to facilitate corporations and students into internships and careers. They are currently establishing a central campus clearinghouse for all internships. Career Services also has a mentorship program.
- Alumni want to help students but often do not know how.
- Alumni want to volunteer. Alumni want to share their knowledge with students in either their academic discipline or the area of shared interest such as student clubs and organizations.
- The philosophy of Aztecs helping Aztecs is worthy of encouragement.
- The campus is already doing much in the areas of student engagement, alumni engagement, parent engagement, mentorship, internship, careerism, engendering student loyalty, encouraging alumni loyalty and encouraging alumni giving. What is more difficult is effectively communicating the scope and potency of these programs to the campus and current alumni communities.

Recommendations:

Continue to strengthen collaborations across campus to build Aztec pride amongst current students to foster life-long loyalty; thus building the pipeline of future alumni involvement. Continue to encourage “Aztec for Life” mantra, building a culture of philanthropy and giving back.

Create an infrastructure to accommodate alumni volunteerism at SDSU. This needs to include student/alumni mentorship—and particularly stronger virtual mentorship, internships, peer to peer fundraising and participation on university committees/advisory boards/award selection committee/special event speakers and more.

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Our rationale is that this is a critical step towards establishing the “virtuous cycle” of improving SDSU and quality of education via alumni engagement and alumni giving, resulting in a higher quality student experience.

The methodology required to affect significant improvement of alumni engagement involves establishing a campus-wide clearinghouse for alumni volunteer opportunities. Currently there are volunteer based programs in each college, division and auxiliary. A partnership between Student Affairs and University Relations & Development—specifically the Alumni Association is essential. The most extensive student mentorship program is in Career Services in Student Affairs. Their fledgling on-line mentorship program is a key element of our recommendation. This program needs an infusion of resources if we truly intend to ramp up our alumni volunteerism opportunities from hundreds to thousands.

In addition, we recommend the importance of tracking current students’ involvements/institutional affinities (academic, extra and co-curricular, study abroad, awards etc.), to better engage alumni. In the future, this will help us understand the alumni’s sense of identity and can focus our engagement, fundraising and development efforts.

We recommend the establishment of a position dedicated to campus coordination of alumni volunteerism. This position would become a single entry point for all alumni volunteers. The volunteer coordinator would have relationships with key campus constituents who utilize volunteers and would become a true resource for alumni and the community to help students succeed. It will focus on utilizing student interest data and other known alumni data to establish comprehensive virtual volunteerism—primarily, but not limited to, virtual mentorship. An advisory board would be created to support the strategies for engaging volunteers. This advisory group would have strong representation from Student Affairs, the colleges, alumni and community. A centralized point person for alumni volunteerism will also help facilitate

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effective cross division understandings, awareness, partnerships, and knowledge.

Proposed funding structure:

- **Year 1-3 University funded at approximately \$60K including benefits. Alumni to supervise and support with \$5K operational budget**
- **Year 3-6 Alumni/University split position funding at approximately \$32.5k each/year**
- **Year 7 and forever Alumni to absorb position and operational budget**