

A Response to the Alumni Review, Trent University

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October 27, 2023

Shanna Hopkins, Director of Alumni Affairs at St. Francis Xavier University and Mary Jessie MacLellan, former Director of Alumni Affairs at St. Francis Xavier University, reviewed Alumni Engagement & Services (AES) in April 2023 and acknowledged that AES is a well-managed and highly regarded team with collegial staff, an excellent volunteer base, and a strong understanding of and commitment to philanthropy. To build upon this long-standing success, the reviewers stated that *“by implementing effective strategic planning, Trent University can foster stronger connections between alumni and the University, increase alumni participation and support, and ultimately enhance the overall reputation and success of Trent. It is crucial for Alumni Engagement Services to continually evaluate and adapt its approach to ensure that it is meeting the evolving needs and expectations of its alumni community.”*

With the understanding that the entire University community reaps benefits when AES better engages Trent’s 62,000+ alumni through volunteer commitments, mentorship, events, and philanthropy, AES embraces the reviewers’ thoughtful recommendations and will implement the recommendations in the following way.

Collaboration and Communication

Best practices in alumni relations include becoming more involved in the student life cycle, from recruitment to graduation, to align and advance institutional goals while enabling a consistent stewardship experience for alumni. AES will establish stronger partnerships across all areas of the University including Marketing & Communications, colleges, departments, Careerspace, Trent International, Community & External Relations, Athletics, School of Graduate Studies, and student governance.

In addition, cross-campus collaborations enable alumni engagement strategies to align closer to alumni affinity. As stated in the 2021-22 Alumni Engagement Survey, 38% of alumni have a primary affinity with the University, 22% with programs, 27% with colleges, and 38% with Athletics.

In keeping with this central recommendation, AES will:

- Establish regular meeting schedules to discuss shared goals and strategies.
- Enhance communication channels to improve information exchange.
- Investigate the feasibility of a digital alumni hub to elevate all alumni events.
- Elevate college, varsity, and department content in alumni communications.

- Evaluate how colleges and departments can better access alumni data.
- Regularly report on alumni-engagement outcomes.
- Elevate collaboration with Marketing and Communications.

Volunteer Engagement

The review notes the importance of engaging alumni as volunteers to support the University, expand the capacity of AES, and to deepen alumni engagement. A number of recommendations were presented and priorities for action will include:

- Fully review the role and format of our growing chapter networks and special interest groups.
- Ensure they have proper resources and support to continue to grow strategically and remain relevant to alumni needs and interests.
- Continue to ensure broad representation of alumni on the TUAA.
- Collaborate with internal departments to identify new ways to engage alumni in their work.
- Refine and enhance the current volunteer management structure and strategies.

Strategic Plan

The reviewers recommend AES lay the groundwork for a new strategic plan that will include a focus on young alumni, digital and social media, Durham GTA, and overall engagement.

AES will develop a 2024-27 strategic plan to be completed before the June Board of Governors meeting. As part of the process, AES will:

- Consult with all campus partners, current students, and alumni.
- Develop a cohesive strategy to better engage students from recruitment to graduation.
- Integrate institutional goals, alumni needs and affinity into all plans.
- Develop a Durham-GTA alumni engagement strategy.
- Establish data benchmarks; improve data collection and reporting.
- Ensure diversity and inclusivity are integrated into all aspects of the plan.
- Diversify event options to include more hybrid and remote.
- Ensure event topics better align with alumni interests such as their primary affiliations, socio-cultural factors, and professional development.

Resources

The number of alumni steadily grows each year in tandem with enrolment increases. The alumni family is increasingly diversified with members from different generations and various socio-cultural backgrounds residing in countries around the world. As such, the review notes that AES requires ongoing additional resources to ensure proper staffing levels (including administrative support and a Durham-GTA-focused Coordinator position), investments in

communications tools, increased travel funds and chapter support, technology to support hybrid events, and sufficient office space to deliver increased alumni support, programming, and engagement opportunities that speak to this wider audience.

To assist in some way with the need for more resources, we will explore growing revenue from existing affinity partners and adding more partnerships.

The Success of Trent AES

AES looks forward with optimism, embracing the future of increased collaborations, a comprehensive understanding of all opportunities for alumni engagement within the University, the implementation of a new strategic plan, an improved focus on data-driven strategy and best practices, and enhanced resources to meet the evolving needs and expectations of our alumni across the globe.