Alumni Library Services: Maintaining Relationships for Life
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Abstract
Columbia University alumni enjoy access to a wide array of electronic resources -- materials from dozens of providers, hundreds of databases, and hundreds of thousands of e-book and e-journal titles.

Yet, alumni regularly express frustration with the lack of content available to them and indicate that there is not enough material in their discipline(s). This negatively impacts alumni relationships with the library and university, affecting current and potential donor relations.

Introduction
This poster outlines a proposal to transform Columbia University Libraries’ static alumni portal into a modern and dynamic tool for alumni research and engagement.

The authors of this poster are two long-term electronic resources librarians, who work with one of the most sizeable electronic resources collections in the nation. Both librarians have graduate degrees in nonprofit & fundraising management, affording them keen insight into the area of electronic services for alumni as it intersects with development efforts.

Analysis
Typical measurement of electronic resources “success” involves quantitative usage statistics, such as COUNTER data or clicks on links.

But what of qualitative user feedback?
- Alumni user surveys could be generated.
- Or we could look at what our alumni users are already telling us via problem reports, responses to development solicitations, and the like. These engaged users offer valuable unsolicited feedback.

Environmental Scan
- Most universities that offer alumni access to electronic resources offer lists of databases available to alumni. These lists exist on Web sites and Library research guides.
- The trouble with this approach is that an alumni has little idea what content is contained within a database until they perform a search. More frustrating still, if they find a citation among their results, they cannot easily tell if the full text might exist within another alumni database.
- No discovery portals were found on peer library sites that the authors were able to access and review.

"I think the alumni access is pretty limited, and I find it ineffective and frustrating. If the library provided broad access to leading journals in the social sciences, I would consider a donation."
- Unsolicited Alumni Feedback

Methods and Materials
- After reviewing qualitative alumni feedback from electronic resource problem reports and donor solicitations, it became apparent to electronic resources librarians that the presentation and discovery of alumni e-resources was responsible for negatively impacting the user experience.
- Electronic resource librarians recognized that particular functionality was lacking for alumni, which they had as students. This includes an e-journal portal, openURL linking, and Web scale discovery.
- As opposed to simply offering a static listing of alumni databases, the advantage to using a “portal” is that specific titles within databases are more transparently and easily exposed to users in a “one-stop shopping” search experience.

"To look for a journal, one has to search each source/database. Useful if one can search for a journal and that can link to the appropriate database. Clio has this feature—can this be implemented for alumni as well?"
- Unsolicited Alumni Feedback

Discussion
Alumni “are among the most powerful, renowned and prestigious people in the world. They’re found in the highest social ranks, and hold positions of enormous influence in all areas including science, commerce, industry, the military, the arts, politics and government.” - Flegg

“Libraries that offer and expend resources to bring information products to their alumni can potentially generate revenue for the library from their alumni/customers.” - Heffer

Most importantly, if the alumni user experience with electronic resources meets or exceeds user needs and expectations, Libraries will have more success with related development efforts.

"In sum, I would love to contribute to Columbia Library - but only after I have the access that I need, and in my mind, deserve."
- Unsolicited Alumni Feedback

Conclusions
Through invoking best practices in both electronic resources management and fundraising management and through applying these principles to alumni electronic resources services, the alumni experience can be positively transformed.

The improved alumni research experience demonstrates continued library value.

It fosters the ongoing reciprocal relationship between library and alumni, respecting alumni’s role as lifelong learners and library supporters.

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Bibliography

Acknowledgements
Thank you to Columbia University Alumni for your invaluable unsolicited feedback and continued use of “E-Resources for Alumni.”
https://library.columbia.edu/sans-libraries/alumni.html