

Alfred University
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

TASK FORCE ON PURPOSE & PROGRAMS

FINAL REPORT

JUNE 1, 2007

Scott D. Brenner, Chair
Ms. Kathleen Benzaquin
Mr. Gregory Connors
Mr. Mark Ferm
Ms. Jessica Gottlieb
Mr. Joseph Smith
Mr. Ken Wissmann

In or about November, 2006, the Alfred University Alumni Council ("Council") formed the Task Force on Purpose and Programs ("Task Force") to make a global self-assessment of the Council's purpose, mission, structure, and programs, and to make recommendations in an effort to achieve greater organizational efficacy in the future. A copy of the "Formal Charge" is annexed to this report as [TAB "1"].

The Task Force began its work and delivered an "Interim Report" at the Alumni Council meeting which took place in Albany, New York, on February 24, 2007 [TAB "2"]. The Interim Report, covering what we termed as "Phase I" of our work, identified areas needing further focus and conveyed preliminary ideas to invite debate among the at-large membership during the February meeting.

The strategy proved successful. The discussion over critical issues such as, for example, the role of the Council vis-à-vis the Alfred University Strategic Plan was extremely helpful to the Task Force. Mark Shardlow rightly pointed out that the Council has achieved a great deal and has much to be proud of in terms of its progress. We also believe, however, that there have been sources of frustration, such as occasional ineffective communication between the Council and the various offices of Alfred University with which we are attempting to coordinate. It has been noted, for example, that following departmental staff transitions at AU, such as in the Alumni Affairs Office and Admissions, there are often long periods where Council interaction is delayed and de-emphasized. A brief summary of the discussion points from the February meeting are annexed to this report as [TAB "3"].

Following the February meeting, the Task Force moved to "Phase II" of its work. Phase II involved a conceptual implementation of the preliminary ideas proposed in the Interim Report, and development of our final proposal. First, we carefully reviewed comments from the general Council membership, and from Christine Kulp who, as our past President, could impart to us many of the past successes and failures of the Council as it restructured over the past few years leading up to the present organization under the leadership of Michael Christakis. Christine, now an Alumni Elected Trustee of the University, provided a great deal of documented information which has proved to be invaluable.

The Task Force also undertook an important "Benchmarking Study" of other Alumni Association Structures at schools such as Colgate, Bucknell, Clarkson, Dartmouth, Michigan State, and Syracuse. The Benchmarking Study's results are annexed to this report as [TAB "4"].

Lastly, it is our belief that the incoming Chairman of AU's Board of Trustees, F. Peter Cuneo is supportive of new initiatives which support better connections with Council and a more direct role for the Alumni Association in the University's growth and development.

Summary of Recommendations

The Task Force recommends the following:

1. Council should continue working primarily through AU University Relations at the tactical level but also work at a more strategic level with the Board of Trustees to establish policies regarding Council's role which will be indoctrinated as stated goals and objectives throughout appropriate levels of University planning.
2. A more aggressive campaign to reach out and connect with alumni. Survey techniques should be employed to find out from alumni and others in the AU Community what they would like to see from the Alumni Association and Council, the Alumni Affairs Office, and the institution as a whole.
3. Craft a Mission Statement with input from the Board of Trustees which is incorporated by reference into the University's own strategic planning documentation. The Mission Statement should suggest a more active role in supporting University functions such as admissions and fund raising.
4. The number of standing committees should be limited to those necessary in managing our most important activities and globally applicable functions. Ad Hoc committees should be formed and staffed optimally to meet each separate tactical need.
5. The life of the Ad Hoc committees should be subject to short term "sunset" provisions (definitive life span) and reviewed periodically to evaluate whether such committee is meeting its goals and should be terminated or extended.
6. Greater effort should be made to recruit Council Members from geographic locations not currently represented. Clubs and Charters should be explored and utilized where positive market impact could be achieved.
7. The number of at-large Council meetings should be reduced to two (2), with Ad-Hoc Committees meeting as needed to accomplish their focused objectives. In lieu of a third meeting, Awards, for example, can be voted on via email and teleconferences can be utilized for debate and discussion.
8. Council member responsibilities should be expanded to include hosting, either individually or in concert with other members, an alumni event in their local geographic region.
9. Council should continue to focus on programs that have been successful in terms of either raising monies for our budget or furthering the mission and purpose of our organization, as well as the University.
10. The Task Force recommends that its review function be continued in some fashion to be decided upon by the Executive Committee.

Our thought process and conclusions are presented below with greater detail. The general format of the Formal Charge is utilized as it is in order to for organizational purposes:

General Purpose

A starting point for examination of the Council's general purpose, mission and strategy is to review and understand AU's overall strategies through interaction with AU University Relations and the Board of Trustees to determine where we can provide leadership and support. The AU Strategic Plan itself is expected to be presented by the University Provost. The plan itself may or may not have an impact on our role – a determination in that regard can not be made at this time primarily since it has not as yet been presented. Nevertheless, Council should pursue further discussions with those at the top of the University's hierarchy (Board of Trustees, President, etc.) to establish policies pursued with full support through University Relations and the various other departments of the institution.

A strategic focal point for the Council has traditionally been to interact with and support University Relations, the executive leadership of which is now in transition as Mike Hyde's replacement for Vice President is still being sought (the quality of the choice is being given emphasis over a set timetable). Mark Shardlow has done a tremendous and much appreciated job of maintaining the connection between Council and the University. Mark attends all Council meetings and provides critical guidance to our planning processes.

Our suggestion is that Council work with the Board of Trustees to establish policies governing Council's overall role. With the support of the Trustees, the policies should then be made an integral part of the new Vice President's organizational objectives. The goal is to address, with full Board of Trustee's support, the as yet insurmountable problem Council experiences in not being part of the program development process. While we do not recommend inserting ourselves as "planning professionals", we strongly believe that the Alumni Association, through the Council, should be brought into the planning circle for input and participation.

One question under our present review is who should the Council serve ? Council should be recognized by the University as the "voice of the Alumni" and that role is difficult to assume without actually connecting with Alumni and knowing what the prevailing issues are that need to be addressed. An alumni association that is organized through Council is a strong powerful association that can accomplish great things. Conversely, a weak association with little centralized direction and ineffective communication among its constituencies can not actualize its or the University's goals. Having that connection between Council and alumni may likewise be an important missing piece in the University's fund raising efforts. Right now, we are working in various ways to enhance that connection, but the Alumni Relations office is currently the most direct liaison.

One example of this direct collaboration was the establishment of the Golden Saxons, an organization whose members have celebrated their 50th class reunion. This Alumni Council created organization (with the support of the Office of University Relations) maintains University contact with graduates for a lifetime. The friend-raising and fund-raising success of this group is very positive and will keep growing. The efficacy of such a structure needs to be discussed further with the Board

of Trustees. We should be careful not to “get in the way” of processes which need to be managed in through AU Alumni Relations in a particular fashion, but instead look for ways to complement the effort and take a leadership role where it is agreed to be advantageous.

We recommend implementing survey techniques to reach out directly and find out from the people we serve what they would like to see from the Alumni Association and Council, the Alumni Affairs Office, and the institution as a whole. Such surveys would be managed by the Council and run through perhaps the AU website, the AU magazine, or a separate publication, inviting responses via email. It is recommended that the surveys be kept simple and cost effective – a few questions only so that people can spend more time thinking carefully about responses as opposed to racing through a lengthy meaningless survey with what little time they have allotted to completing it.

In our view, Council should continue finding ways such as surveys, events, and phone campaigns, to reach out and provide alumni with new ways to communicate with the AU Community. We believe that this may lead to better fund raising in the event that disappointments and grievances can be communicated through ways other than withholding donations. For example, there may be programs pursued or abandoned which may have the effect of alienating certain constituencies. These people need to be communicated with by other alumni – not by AU staff who run the risk of being perceived as caring more about donations than hearing and responding to grievances. Should an issue be important enough, we might invite such alumni to a Council meeting and allow them to participate and/or speak at the meeting on an ad hoc basis.

With regard to the AU Community, our involvement depends on how this term is defined. The AU Community includes alumni, students, faculty, administration, and staff. In our view, the term has no geographical limitation and to the extent the Council is involved in AU Community affairs, we must decide where and when our reach will extend beyond alumni alone. For example, we have discussed the possibility of extending our exposure to senior students so that they leave the University with something more than a metaphysical connection to it. Our current efforts in reaching out to this constituency should be continued and enhanced at every opportunity. The Student Alumni Association failed and shut down last year, but we have continued connecting with students through our presence at various events, lecturing in the classroom, the Women’s Leadership Advisory Board, and the Ring program – including the presentation. The Task Force notes that many of these efforts increase Association exposure generally, but do not provide a forum for two-way communication with senior students. One suggestion is to take a closer look at why the Student Alumni Association failed and explore the possibility of improving and reinstituting the general principle of supporting a student organization.

The Task Force further recommends that we continue with our efforts to participate with AU faculty, offering to network among alumni for speaking engagements at the school, in the classroom, or inviting classes of students out for some exposure to real world business, engineering, etc.

Mission Review

Our “mission” and “general purpose” are inexorably intertwined and to some extent even synonymous. However, the Task Force views the mission as a formal determination of those

aspects of the Council's general purpose which need to be indoctrinated for purposes of guiding our overall focus. Formulation of a mission statement, after carefully evaluating our general purposes, organizational structure, and programs leads to a healthy system of introspection and adjustment to all of these aspects of managing the Council going forward. It is also our hope that the mission statement be incorporated by reference into the University's strategic planning documentation.

The current mission statement of the Counsel is set forth in two parts of the Alumni Association Constitution as follows:

Article II – Purpose

Section 1. *Purpose* – The purpose of the Alfred University Alumni Association is to provide the means for a continuing relationship between the University and alumni. The Association endeavors to foster a deep concern among its members for the welfare of the University, which is made manifest through a commitment to provide service to the institution, alumni and students.

Members of the Association will work to preserve and enhance the history and traditions of Alfred University, contribute toward maintaining Alfred University in keeping with the aims and ideals of its charter, help attract outstanding students to the University, assist the career development of students and fellow alumni, encourage gifts of financial support to the University, provide for the recognition of outstanding alumni and friends of the University; and assist with the planning and implementation of alumni and student programs.

Article VI – Alumni Council

Section 1. *Purpose* – The Alumni Council, is the governing and working body of the Alumni Association.

The *Duties* of the Council as stated in the Constitution also shed light on its purpose:

Section 6. *Duties* – The Council shall manage, direct, control and administer the property, affairs, and business of the Association as provided by such By-laws as may be enacted by it; shall be responsible for all financial matters of the Association; shall elect its officers; shall nominate and appoint its members; shall select Alumni Elected Trustees and shall act for and on behalf of the Association in all matters within the jurisdiction of the Council.

The Task Force recommends a more aggressive mission statement which suggests a more active role in supporting University functions such as admissions and fund raising. This is an area to be focused on in discussions with the Board of Trustees, which we anticipate will take place very soon.

Once further developed and agreed upon, such a mission statement should be acknowledged and supported by the policies incorporated into the University's strategic plan or even it's Charter. Our Benchmarking Study revealed the existence of University level Charter support for Alumni Association roles such as Dartmouth's Charter which provides for direct Alumni Association

participation in the election of Trustees. This point can not be overstated – there needs to be indoctrinated policies unequivocally supported by the Board of Trustees and University administration which in turn trickles down to govern the interaction of Council with various University departments such as Admissions, Career Development, and University Relations.

It is the Task Force's current position that Council needs to take a leadership role in managing support for the University's strategic vision within the AU Community and among alumni particularly. Such an effort involves creating connections with alumni, students, and friends of AU, and encouraging their involvement in the issues that impact AU's vitality both in the shorter and longer terms. The mission statement should demonstrate the University's commitment to utilizing the Council as a means to marshal support for the University, be it financial support, academic, moral, or political support. It is for this reason that the Task Force reserves formulation of the actual mission statement until Council's Executive Committee has had an opportunity to more formally develop its mission and general purpose through discussions with the Board of Trustees.

Creation of a mission statement, evaluation of our programs and how we organize are of such critical importance that we recommend a continuous on-going effort to re-evaluate our activities, structure, etc. and make appropriate adjustments in order to keep all of these pieces better aligned with the mission (as it may further evolve). Whether this be accomplished through the Task Force as a standing sub-committee of the Governance and Organizational Development Committee, or through some other vehicle is to be determined by the Executive Committee.

Structure

Council's current organizational structure is illustrated in [TAB #5]. We believe that the emphasis of Council's organizational structure should be to maintain an optimal level of simplicity and flexibility. In order to achieve that, our recommendation is to limit the number of standing committees to those necessary in managing our most important activities and globally applicable functions. As projects arise, instead of assigning them to existing standing committees, Ad Hoc committees should be formed and staffed optimally to meet each specific challenge. The life of the Ad Hoc committees should be subject to short term "sunset" provisions (definitive life span) and reviewed periodically to evaluate whether such committee is meeting its goals and should be terminated or extended.

It should be noted that this recommendation is consistent with the restructuring effort undertaken by the Council over the last few years. The current structure, as illustrated in [TAB #5] is a significant step in the recommended direction. We have reviewed the Constitution and Bylaws of the Association and believe that the current language sufficiently supports this structure – Council simply needs to be mindful of it and continue the effort to emphasize simplification, flexibility and expedience.

We need to be careful not to over-formalize the process. Organization is important, but not as an end in itself. It is, and must be viewed as, a tool for implementing our mission. Our structure must effectively operationalize our objectives and allow the full measure of participation without

hindering its ability to accomplish goals with necessary expedience. Upon formation of Ad Hoc Committees, therefore, the Council, and particularly the Executive Committee, should set the mode of communications appropriately, allowing for telephonic and informal decision-making where appropriate. For example, if there is an event being scheduled in the immediate future, the Executive Committee should create an Ad-Hoc Committee to manage the event. The enabling directive should staff the Committee as well as establish guidelines for the Committee's decision making and implementation strategies. The Ad Hoc Committee should be advised of deadlines and given the latitude to communicate and vote through the most appropriate medium given the circumstances. Finally, the directive should include a Sunset provision as discussed above. Such Executive Committee action should be subject to Council discussion and vote where feasible but in the event such action needs to be taken between meetings, the Executive Committee should be free to take the action subject to ratification by Council at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Another structural issue is our membership. We are still looking at issues such as whether we are of optimal size as well as whether we represent a proper cross-section of alumni. For example, the Task Force recommends focusing on recruiting efforts to bring more alumni into the fold from the school of Arts and Sciences, Business, Art, Engineering, Nursing, etc. and on recruitment by geographic region. As evidenced in the Benchmarking Study, other institutions have established Chapters or Clubs by geographic region. Such Chapters and/or Clubs create a buzz and give the University great exposure. Physical plant for such an initiative should and will be discussed with the Board of Trustees. However, there is nothing preventing Council from creating regional/local Chapters to complement its recruitment efforts geographically.

The Chapters should be established organically as enough interest in a particular region materializes. For example, we recommend that each existing Council member host events in their locale as a requirement of membership. As events are organized and take place, members can "test the market" and feel out the establishment of a Chapter by speaking with alumni. Surveys can also be used in this regard.

As Council positions become available, Council should work with University Relations to target as yet unrepresented regions where current alumni are concentrated. Calls and recruitment efforts should then be targeted to those geographic areas. New members would then organize events locally and if the interest is great enough, establish a local Chapter. It's important to note that the Chapter concept is not being recommended as a way of organizing the Council. It is simply recommended as a marketing tool – a way to convey to non-Council alumni that the Association is focused on bringing them into the fold and making them integral to the AU Community.

It has been suggested that we are too large and should further limit membership. The Task Force recommends that the size of the Council should not be the focus. Rather, the focus needs to be on whether we are achieving our goals and objectives. If so, or if not, then the size of the organization membership is but one factor to look at in terms of cause and effect.

After our discussion during the February Council meeting, it was concluded that a fee for membership in the Alumni Association should not be pursued at this time. However, activity specific fees should be pursued where necessary to fund events either on campus or in regional locations.

Meetings

A specific sub-issue of structure is the conduct of Council meetings. The Task Force strongly recommends some changes to the number of meetings and the manner in which the awards process is handled.

The number of at-large Council meetings should be reduced to two (2), with Ad-Hoc Committees meeting as needed to accomplish their focused objectives. We are finding that many alumni who could and otherwise want to contribute, are having difficulty committing to three mandatory meetings. The Task Force also believes that the issues requiring debate and voting by the Council can easily be accomplished in two rather than three meetings. Awards, for example, can be voted on via email and teleconferences can be utilized for debate and discussion. The cost of such teleconferences is minimal in comparison to the savings resulting from less travel to meetings. Where certain awards need an in-person debate and voting process, perhaps other typical agenda items can be handled either through Ad-Hoc processes or in telephonic meetings, followed by email voting.

The two meetings should remain scheduled in the Fall and on Reunion weekends respectively. It is our understanding that the current fall meeting is scheduled to take place following the Board of Trustees meeting which does not necessarily fall on Homecoming Weekend. The Fall Meeting should be utilized to finalize planning and last minute details for the Homecoming Weekend and plan in detail for the next Reunion Weekend. Additionally, members of the Board of Trustees, AU staff, faculty, etc. from the various departments who are knowledgeable about such departmental functions can be invited in to present short informational sessions for us. The purpose should include areas of involvement with the Council, or if there is no present involvement of Council, then areas of possible involvement can and should be discussed.

The Reunion Weekend Meeting should be utilized to finalize planning and last minute details for the Reunion Weekend and plan in detail for the next Homecoming Weekend. Additionally, the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees should be invited to directly address the Council on the status of all facets of the Board's business as well as initiatives the Chairperson believes relevant and appropriate for purposes of reporting and involving the Council. This has already been discussed with Chair-elect Peter Cuneo who welcomes the idea.

At each of the above meetings, the Task Force recommends that some time be allotted for members to report on their individual involvement with the University and any opportunities that may exist for further mentoring, student interaction, women's leadership activities, career counseling assistance including the employer-in-residence program, fundraising assistance, etc.

Programs

The Task Force recommends that Council continue to focus on programs that have been successful in terms of either raising monies for our budget or furthering the mission and purpose of our organization, as well as the University. For example, the Awards program has been hugely successful in making and maintaining connections with AU alumni. We believe it also has impact in creating incentives for Alumni to either participate actively in some capacity with the University to further its mission, or to succeed as a leader in that person's industry – thereby exposing AU as a quality institution worldwide. The Ring program has also been successful making connections with students and alumni alike, give the Council exposure within the AU Community, and raising funds to support our budget and other programs.

Homecoming and Reunion activities have likewise been a great success for all of the above stated reasons and should be continued in all respects. This includes the tailgate party, hall of fame dinner, etc. We might add some activities which further our mission and purpose as well. For example, we strongly recommend establishing, during Homecoming Weekend, a Friday afternoon reception in the Fasano House for seniors/graduating students which either all Council members attend and work the room or a select group of Council members is dispatched. The purpose is to introduce ourselves on a more personal level, welcome them to the Alumni Association, provide information about Rings and general activities/events, and provide a gateway for networking and support in their professional job search efforts, etc.

Mark Shardlow embraced the idea of utilizing Council member volunteers to assist with Homecoming/Reunion activities – we should pursue this invitation aggressively. The Task force believes that a Local Alumni Outreach program should be explored as a way to interface further with AU administration, staff and students on a more regular basis.

The Task Force strongly recommends that Council member responsibilities be expanded to include hosting, either individually or in concert, an alumni event in their local geographic region. The frequency and rotation of members initiating events should be worked out by the Executive Committee and result from its analysis of budget limitations as well as which Council members are most senior and need to satisfy the requirement before their tenure ends. Such events can be creative, can include a sporting event or cocktail reception, dinner, etc. The sky's the limit but not so for the budget so members need to be mindful that they should balance their ideas against the overall cost-effectiveness of the event. Each member should be encouraged to provide a proposal which includes the anticipated cost of the event. The event and its funding should be approved by the Executive Committee since aspects would include input from the Second VP who chairs the Alumni & Student Programs Committee, and the Treasurer. The Executive Committee is in the best position to work out how much funding can be allocated from program receipts, how much funding should be requested from the University (University Relations), and how much of a contribution should be made directly by the alumni in attendance. University Relations should be encouraged to support this effort by providing mailings, any available funding additional to the funding Council and/or its members individually provide, etc.

Continuation of Task Force Functions / Surveys

The Task Force recommends that its review function be continued in some fashion to be decided upon by the Executive Committee. We see this as a most fitting function of the Governance & Organizational Development Committee, and could possibly be a standing sub-committee within that structure. The primary function of the continued effort would be to focus and report on continued efforts to assess the Council's purpose, mission, programs and activities. Its analysis would include continued benchmarking studies, reflecting on what other like institutions have done and reach out to those Alumni Associations, cross-communicating ideas and information regarding successes and failures, and structural issues. Reports should be proffered annually, which follow the general format of the Task Force Formal Charge, as does this report.

Surveys of various AU Community constituencies (with primary focus on alumni) should be an additional function to be managed and reported on by this sub-committee or other organizational unit. We can further develop and report on survey ideas, questions, and methodologies over time, but we so far envision it as a very simple process where recipients can respond electronically through email or otherwise (one idea could be to utilize "Survey Monkey" or a like program). Surveys assist in generating ideas about programs, events and activities. They provide a vehicle for venting to alumni and help collect information about attitudes toward University policies of particular interest. One lesson learned through the American experience as a whole is the failed notion of "taxing" constituencies not invited to participate at some level in the creation of policy. Surveys convey that we are truly attempting to be a representative organization - interested in serving the Alumni Association as a whole and delivering its message to the University's administration, seeking responsive action, and reporting results.

It has been our sincere privilege as a group to serve on this Task Force, and address the issues raised in the Formal Charge. Our hope is that we have served our function effectively. The Formal Charge was skillfully devised and provided the blueprint for our work. The contents of this document are viewed by us as "work in progress" – true to the blueprint, and providing a footpath for further defining and achieving our purposes, goals and objectives.

Respectfully Submitted,
Alfred University Alumni Council
Task Force on Purpose & Programs

Scott D. Brenner, Chairperson
Kathleen Benzaquin
Gregory Connors
Mark Ferm
Jessica Gottlieb

Joseph Smith
Ken Wissmann