

Alumni Engagement and Student Success Through Shared Affinities

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Background

This research project aims to investigate the relationship between alumni engagement and student success at Florida State University. We investigated the reasons and methods behind alumni remaining connected to the university, and determined which student groups alumni are most likely to engage with. Over a five-month period, we collected qualitative data in interviews, conducted 40 interviews with students and 40 interviews with alumni. This consisted of collecting qualitative data on the involvement of each constituent at the university during or after graduation, based on the constituent we spoke to. The interviews were examined with our research mentor, Ms. Jacey Darrah, in one-on-one meetings to determine the correlation between different methods of participation as alumni, the spaces in which they were involved, and any limitations to participation. In addition, we received data from Undergraduate Studies (UGS) event surveys and UGS email communications. The project demonstrates that alumni who were heavily involved with affinity programming during their undergraduate years are more likely to remain active post-graduation, and similarly, engaged students are more likely to interact with alumni. The findings suggest that inviting more alumni to campus events and encouraging student participation in professional development organizations can broaden the university's alumni base.

Methods

- 1:1 interviews took place via the Zoom platform or phone call.
- 80 interviews were conducted: 40 with alumni, 40 with students, across a five-month period, which consisted of standardized open-ended empathy questions.
- The initial contact emails to schedule an interview and the thank-you follow-ups were managed through Outlook, with Ms. Jacey Darrah being carbon copied on all email correspondences.
- The interviewees were either alumni referred by Ms. Jacey Darrah, or students identified by the student researchers.
- Discussion of 1:1 interviews and event survey analysis, of the UGS Who You Can Become series, as well as email communication with Ms. Jacey Darrah on a bi-weekly basis via the Zoom platform or in-person.
- Our student researcher-mentor discussions referenced CASE Alumni Engagement Metrics as a starting ground for identifying patterns in constituent actions, emotions, and thoughts on available engagement opportunities.
- Student researchers tracked responses in ExCEL, which we forwarded to Ms. Jacey Darrah before our bi-weekly project meeting to identify correlated engagement patterns.

Empathy Interviews

Concept from Chelsea Haring of Switchboard and Robyn Stille, Sr. Director of Colleges, Schools, and Units at FSU

- Listening without an agenda to make the constituent feel heard
- Asking open-ended questions
- Identify strengths
- Identify weaknesses



Figure 5: "Empathy Interviews" and breakdown, as presented in Amplifying Alumni Voices for Student Success by Ms. Jacey Darrah at the Southeast CASE District III Annual Conference.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to Ms. Jacey Darrah, Associate Director of Alumni and Student Engagement for the Division of Undergraduate Studies at FSU, for her mentorship during the 2024-2025 academic year as our mentor in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. Our gratitude also extends to our alumni and student interviewees.

Interviewee Demographics - Alumni

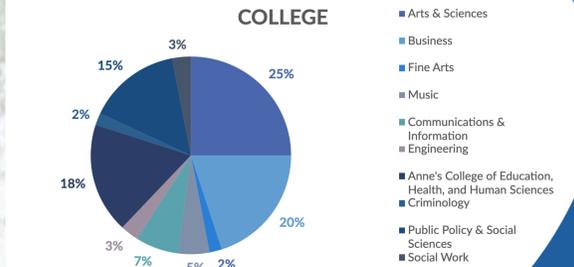


Figure 1: "Interviewee Demographics – Alumni" as presented in Amplifying Alumni Voices for Student Success by Ms. Jacey Darrah at the Southeast CASE District III Annual Conference.

Interviewee Demographics - Alumni

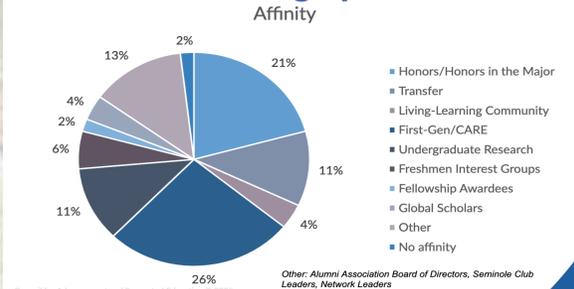


Figure 2: "Interviewee Demographics – Alumni" as presented in Amplifying Alumni Voices for Student Success by Ms. Jacey Darrah at the Southeast CASE District III Annual Conference.

Interviewee Demographics - Students

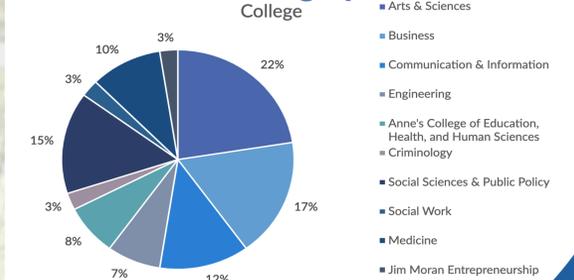


Figure 3: "Interviewee Demographics – Students" as presented in Amplifying Alumni Voices for Student Success by Ms. Jacey Darrah at the Southeast CASE District III Annual Conference.

Interviewee Demographics - Students

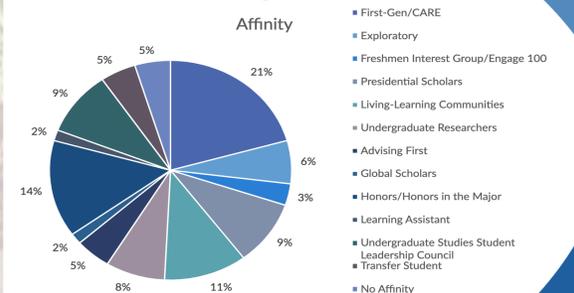


Figure 4: "Interviewee Demographics – Students" as presented in Amplifying Alumni Voices for Student Success by Ms. Jacey Darrah at the Southeast CASE District III Annual Conference.

Results

Alumni

- Prefer bite-sized information about students.
- Are more likely to open emails from UGS affinities they were involved with.
- Want to stay informed about campus happenings.
- Like mentoring students and offering career-related guidance.
- Want to know exactly where their monetary donations go.
- Value recognition and incentives for their contributions.
- Need to see the impact of their volunteerism on student success.

Students

- Need bite-sized content and quick engagements.
- Seek a sense of belonging within a community or affinity program.
- Students who don't feel like they belong are less likely to engage.
- Need information delivered multiple times in a short, digestible format.

Major themes

- Affinities are important.
- Recognition is key – personalized amplification.
- Everyone is busy – create engagements that are bite sized and easy to engage with.
- Engaged students become engaged alumni who become engaged donors.

Outcomes

- UGS Student Leadership Council – 30 students representing each of the UGS identified affinity programs and engaging with alumni and donors.
- Who You Can Become Webinars – Successful alumni talking about their careers and their experiences at FSU to students.
- Targeted Alumni Emails and Newsletters – higher open and response rates.
- Student to Alumni Pipeline Building – welcoming graduating students to the alumni family through targeted outreach.
- First-Generation Alumni Network – aims to cultivate an engaged group of first-generation alumni who advocate for the needs of first-generation alumni and support students through community-based initiatives.



Figure 7: **References** for *Alumni Engagement and Student Success Through Shared Affinities*.



Figure 6: Jasmeen Santos-Ramirez, Emily Tully, Ms. Jacey Darrah, Member of the Student Leadership Council and Members of the First-Generation Alumni Network participating in the 2024 Homecoming Parade.