

FOOW?
(Fish Out Of Water?)
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FOOW? solving for *Y* blog series

FOOW? asked College Alums a series of questions about career support *before* and *after* graduation...and created a blog series about the results and alums' responses.

Career Services + Alumni Relations =
*whY Alums **connect** or **disconnect** after graduation*

Whether you are saying *What Now!* or
Now What? in your Career,
FOOW? can help!



Blog and Survey Introduction

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Have you ever used the Career Center Services? Why?

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Are you involved in any Alumni Activities?

§

Did you feel like your college supported you beyond graduation? Why?

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How Can the Alumni Associations or Career Centers improve?

§

Have you ever donated money to your college? Why?

Blog and Survey Introduction

FOOW? asked Alums a series of questions about their Alma Maters' support before and after graduation and how it has impacted their current relationship with their former school. The *respondents', ages 22-62, provided insight on the challenge of answering their *Now What?*, with or without their school support.

Depending upon the college or university, career services exclusively supports students up to graduation, while Alumni Relations continues the support afterward. In some cases, the line is drawn very clearly, while in others, there is a partnership between the two that extends Alumni support.

Exploring your *Now What?* is a journey in both lessons and mistakes, requiring a variety of guides along the way. These guides will come in many forms- teachers/professors, counselors, associations, friends, family and sometimes strangers; but what makes us connect to them is how well they meet our immediate needs, our "Reality".

Your situation plus your Reality consciousness can make answering your *Now What?* a tricky proposition. Reality is an unforgiving friend, because it comes with a truth that most of prefer to ignore; it is the space between where we think we are and where we think we should be. *You think you should wear designer clothing to project a successful image, but your salary says you should design-your-own.*

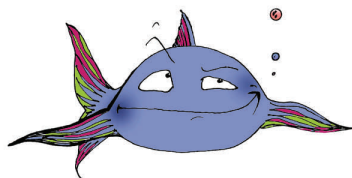
For some, the transition of their degree from paper into the workplace can make them feel like a wet fish on dry land. They are eager to put their degree to work but can't quite find their flow to contentment because that flow is filled with experiences of joy, disappointment and discontentment sprinkled with periods of bewilderment. The process of merging our expectations with reality comes with expectations not being met immediately, feelings of being underutilized coupled with grunt work. People will tell you it is called 'paying your dues', but the question you may need help with is 'how will I know the difference between timely payments and overpayment?'

The career services and alumni relations BIG CHALLENGE is to help with these experiences before, during and after graduation and the solutions are not one dimensional. Their intentions and goals are to create a platform of support for students and graduatesbut as in life; Reality can get in the way.

We asked....

***Have you ever used your college career center services? 54% - YES**

***Are you involved in any alumni activities - 88% - NO**



Alums respond to “Have you ever used the Career Center Services?”

The three “B’s” through college includes *Before*, *Becoming* and *Beyond* graduation. *Before* you begin, you pick a major and set out *Becoming* that by finishing the requirements. *Beyond* graduation the process of defining your success begins -which will look different for everyone. Some will find their life work and others may find discontent, requiring them to review their initial choice and whether or not their dissatisfaction is temporary or permanent. To start this evaluation, naturally they will look within their comfort zones for help i.e., family, friends, mentors, teachers/professors, career centers and alumni associations. The question is- if they look to their alma mater for support, will they find it? We asked alums...

Have you ever used your college career center services? 54% - YES

Their usage and results varied among the age groups ranging from very, very helpful to “No, not so much.” Alums ages 21-34 tended to rely on their advisors and professors for career coaching and career centers for resume writing, interview preparation and networking leads compared to alums over 34. Alums 35-43 and 45-54 gave higher marks for results and their connection appeared to be more intimate. The alums that said they never used their Career Centers relied exclusively on their advisors, professors and friend network for job hunting, especially in the 21-34 age group. The over 35 alums stated their non-use was due to the demand of their major and/or they chose to use outside networking.

Is it possible, that the convenience of all the online career tools is contributing to the no’s and the lack of intimacy with the 21-34 alums? Are both sides (students & career centers) missing opportunities? Again, everyone defines success differently and will take many roads to get there. Sometimes, “It’s not what you know, but *who* you know” is applicable when your car of success has hit a ditch and you need a tow from your comfort zone.

Alums commenting about their Career Center experience:

“They were very, very helpful” - ‘86 Alum

“Very helpful in terms of interview preparation, resume writing. But would have enjoyed more help/discussion about how corporate America works, what’s acceptable in the business world, how to not be used/abused as an entry level employee, how to assert yourself at the workplace etc” -05 Alum

“Very helpful and I encourage everyone to use them” - ‘96 Alum

“I used the college career services when I was in college. It was helpful to connect to people in my field. ‘04 Alum

Yes, very helpful. In fact I encourage all Students to use the Career Placement Office-.’86 Alum

No, I didn’t use them because other resources were available to me within my department.-’98 Alum

“There was nothing they could provide that I couldn’t figure out for myself” -’04 Alum

“You need the support from the career services more after graduating. - ‘85 Alum

“I think some colleges nowadays are catering too much to students. Sometimes it is nice to live in a bubble but college students need to learn how to be more independent when it comes to being in the “real world”.’02 Alum

“It seems as though the best way I have encountered career help came in the form of my advisers. The advisers were the people to talk to about what is out there for new grads. They were even the best at helping prepare applications and resumes.” - ‘04 Alum

Alumni Outreach...Can they hear you now?

The success of Alumni Associations depends on their ability to build relationships around the evolving needs of graduates with diverse interests and motivation. Since it is difficult if not impossible to appeal to everyone, the challenge is how to appeal to most grads while they are accumulating life experiences. How to create a personal connection with grads outside of the campus area? How to create loyalty from grads with various pursuits?

Today's alums are looking for personal and professional development support, i.e., unemployed and employed, single and married, second thoughts to a second career and every change in-between. Helping them define themselves through these changes is an enormous challenge for associations and they are using various tactics to connect to grads. Some universities connect better by having their alumni outreach located in the schools/colleges versus having a centralized Alumni Association. A number of associations are offering workshops addressing issues beyond graduation although the campus-focus may be limiting their results. Either way, the listening audience may be shrinking:

Are you currently involved in any Alumni activities? Why?

88% of our surveyed participants said *No*. 49% between ages 21-34, 12% - ages 35-44 and 27%- over 45. The majority are in touch with their college friends and advisors/professors which they preferred over alumni activities. Distance from school, convenience, value, disinterest and being turned off by the heavy solicitations for donations were common reasons for lack of participation:

"Not a member of the alumni association. I guess I don't see a big benefit to joining the alumni association. I enjoyed my college experience and am a loyal fan of their sport teams, but did not stay involved in the school."

-91 Alum

"No. I haven't heard of any programs that interest me."

-99 Alum

"Not formal alumni events, but my classmates and I plan several whole group activities each year."

-04 Alum

"No, activities are scheduled at the college. Also, and maybe more importantly, I am in contact with my close friends and most of them are not involved either."

-02 Alum

For some, it's like a friend who is always having parties at their house, you may like them but it is too much of a hassle to go. Being friendly, they then send you updates with candid shots of the event letting you know that you were missed. "But oh by the way, if you would like to donate, that would be nice too." What?! "Dude, can you party near my place sometimes or at least meet me somewhere half way."

Perceived value of the Alumni Association varies among age groups. Loyalty is not a foregone conclusion with the younger generation; they expect you to **earn** it. What's in it for me and how does it make my life easier? The older generations tend to allow inherent loyalty in relationships—it's my Alma Mater, I will donate or not based on that alone:

"No. Our Alumni Association is so big that Alumni activities are not the best way to keep in touch with my friends. Also, I was never particularly interested in football, which seems to be a central theme in many alumni activities."

-06 Alum

"I almost feel forgotten by my university."

-08 Alum

"Yes. I belong to the Alumni Association. I was a mentor for my College department"

-72 alum

"Yes I participate for networking and continuing education"

-86 Alum

Continues on Next page...

Comments Continues from Alumni Outreach... Can they hear you now?

Most of today's alums are looking for their Alma Maters to help them thrive instead of survive. If they are thriving they will return the favor in support- personally, professional and financially. If they aren't they tend to be indifferent and a little cynical:

"No, they are always trying to put a good spin on events while stalking you for money. I can't figure out how they keep getting my address." -92 Alum

"It would be great if alumni programs helped more and did not just ask for funds." -78 Alum

"No, Lack of interest." - 98 Alum

"No - not interested, no time." -04 Alum

"No. Not interested."-81 Alum

"Students need to be aware of the Alumni services while attending. In addition, the emails I receive are directed at donating funds not really speaking about the services that are offered." -89 Alum

"No, I did not feel a connection to the school and felt that the administrative side of the business was poor. The school experience left a bad taste."-89 Alum

Alums...Preparing the Search for Satisfaction

Preparation, Searching and Satisfaction are the lanes on the road to maturity. The ideal path would be: our parents *prepare* us for life, and then release us to *search* for who we are and what we want in the world. We stumble around for a while, eventually landing in a place of fulfillment or *satisfaction*. The same principle applies on our career path. We prepare ourselves through college or other training, start searching to apply that training in the workplace – with hopes of eventually finding job satisfaction. Some of us progress easily through all three phases with minimum drama, but more often it's a bumpy road that's complicated by speed limits, breakdowns, flat tires and detours to Stuckville.

We've all been there. Stuckville is that place where we spin our wheels because we aren't ready to travel to the next phase; it is typically populated by people who are:

- Stuck in preparation and not ready to grow up: "*Dude, you're 35 and been in college for 17 years, GRADUATE already!*"
- Stuck being too comfortable in their comfort zone: "*Wearing Prada while living at home is **not** a good look.*"
- Stuck being uncomfortable in their comfort zone: "*Are you saying, **every** boss you had, hated **you** and that's why you got fired, **again?***"
- Stuck defining their life through superficial accomplishments without emotional maturity: "*How do you manage to include your job title, house and car in every conversation? I just asked you to **pass the salt?***"

Short visits in Stuckville are common and even, well, *normal*. But when you are living there or visiting frequently with a caravan full of sticky baggage...you become stuck on blaming others, stuck on boredom, stuck on irresponsibility and just stuck on being STUCK. During these times you need exit ramps leading you to the right people, at the right time, to help you move on.

Exit ramp advice is like anything else, it has its **Good** – "*finding yourself is a process of peaks and valleys that will eventually get you where you need to be. So, hang in there!*" its **Bad** – "*everyone hates their job, just be grateful you got one and get over it!*" And **the Ugly truth** – "*only you can define yourself so stop asking and waiting for others to do it for you. Plus, you're over 30 and living in your parents' basement, call U-HAUL and get moving!*"

In the words of John Foster Dulles–The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year.

We asked.... *Did you feel like your college supported you beyond graduation? Why?*

15%- **YES** ♦ 66% - **NO** ♦ 19%- **YES & NO**

- ♦83 percent of the surveyed alums who answered **Yes** (15%) were aged 21-34 years old; the remaining 17 percent were over 44.

Reputation yes. '06 Alum

Yes, the college has been very supportive. I go back to campus often. I still use their library to do work or study, I'm in contact with the career services office and I'm still occasionally speak with my advisor. '03 Alum
Yes, still have career services access and connections to employers from on-campus jobs and professors for references. '06 Alum ...[Comments Continues](#)

Comments Continues.... *Did you feel like your college supported you beyond graduation? Why?*

*"Several teachers that I had in college I have used as a reference or just a sounding board. '04 Alum
Yes. They have kept me apprised of alumni events, campus developments, and the life turns of alumni. '97
Alum*

*Yes, I stay in contact with my professors/director/advisors. They have been references for jobs/graduate school/
national appointments. They have recommended me for awards/recognition. '89 Alum*

*Yes. Offering networking activities, web sites for collaboration, access to e-library holdings, job search, con-
tinuing education opportunities, helping other students. '86 Alum*

◆63 percent of respondents who said No (66%) were 21-34 years old, 15 percent were 35-44 years old, and 22 percent were over 44.

*No. I felt I had no help beyond graduation. No one reached out to me beyond hitting me up for donations. '04
Alum*

*No. You could almost say that my choice of school was very poor...but what teen ever knows what's best for
their life? '04 Alum*

No, not in a job sense, but I do feel like they keep me up to date with what is going on. '97 Alum

No, Haven't received any communication from them other than requests for donations.'98 Alum

*No. The only time I hear from my college is when they are fund raising. There are no activities that provide
career opportunities or growth. '85 Alum*

*Nope! I didn't need them for help. I had made many of my own connections and worked those. I really didn't
know that the college provided help beyond graduation. '80 Alum*

*No. They did not help with job placement or anything post graduation. They do keep asking for donations.
Don't think they knew then what we know now.'78 Alum*

◆62.5 percent of those who answered Yes & No (19%) were 21-34 years old; the remaining 37.5 percent were over 44.

*"Yes and no. While we still have access to our Career Services Center, they really don't have any outreach or
seminars directed to graduates or helping grads find jobs after they've been out of college for some time. But
yes, because I am still in contact with most of my professors (from my major and minor studies), and they are
always helpful and willing to write recommendations, give feedback or advice, or to just chat and catch up. '04
Alum*

*My college prepared me for my job as best as it could. There were classes on how to write a resume and people
to look over it. If I wanted to stay in the local area they had job fairs with local businesses. Beyond that, not so
much. '02 Alum*

Yes and no - I receive an Alumni Magazine, but there is little support or contact beyond that.'99 Alum

From Career Train Wreck To Church Envelopes, and Back Again to Alums

My encounter with church envelopes taught me that in a career train wreck every light in the tunnel is not a way out.

At the time, my job was a train wreck pile-up of unchallenging responsibilities coupled with bickering, backstabbing, and bitter co-workers on the management team. I was frantically sending out résumés to escape this disaster and a company contacted me, looking for a manager to create infrastructure to improve their employee and customer experience. Since that was my fame, I took the bait and arrived at the interview revving to go. I immediately learned that the division created **church envelopes**. And the hiring manager had more passion about the envelopes than a half-naked, painted football fan in Wisconsin.

The manager effused enthusiastically about geographic areas, various religions and the intriguing intricacies of the church envelope business. His enthusiasm, fascination for the product and his accomplishments were clearly a thrill a minute to himself. I, on the other hand, was underwhelmed. Being curious by nature and harboring a love of problem solving, I have never once wondered about the origins of church envelopes. And yet, there I sat, listening to the story behind the *churches* **and** the *envelopes* with a plastered smile...wondering about the injury potential of leaping from a 4th floor window in a suit and 3-inch heels.

Church envelopes **plus** a manager who focused on his accomplishments while dismissing employee development to off-the-shelf tape viewings **equaled** what? Another train wreck? Or was I being paranoid? So I started asking questions to clarify expectations and they basically went unanswered; instead, he stayed on the course of describing his accomplishments over the years. Without a doubt, there was an “I” in his team, which meant his definition of progress was myopic at best, and more underwhelming than church envelopes. It was also clear that he wasn’t the one pushing for this new position and wasn’t on board.

At some point, I realized that jumping out the window in the middle of the interview was, at a minimum, unprofessional. But still, I had to lecture my *desperate self* who was urging me on, “*take it!, at least you will escape your current wreck.*” My *logical self* was saying, *Girl you better RECOGNIZE that every light in the tunnel isn’t an escape, sometimes it’s just another train.* I finally threw my *desperate self* out the window and kept sending résumés until I received a better match.

Personally or professionally, change can be a challenge. However, when your *desperate self* is in **complete** control, the results can be unfavorable regardless of the challenge. A little desperation mixed with logic is not a bad thing. Desperation can motivate you to change, and logic can help you evaluate past decisions that resulted in your current situation.

Later, I realized that the interview was a meeting of despair, where the manager was desperate to maintain the status quo and I was desperate to escape my wreck. By luck, my *logical self* slapped my *desperate self* off the train tracks which lead to better decision making by me. For the manager, I assumed he eventually got on board because for change to happen favorably, buy-in is needed – especially at the leadership level. If not, you will have a situation where someone is always waiting for his or her *turn* to speak, without the benefit of listening. *We asked Alums... How can the Alum Associations or Career Centers improve? ...[Comments on next page](#)*

Comments from...How can the Alum Associations or Career Centers improve?

For Alumni Associations and Career Centers

“Offering courses that help further develop your professional career roadmap/skills as you transition through the different stages in your career. Helping to evaluate what has worked in your career, what’s important, and how your path needs to change as your lifestyle evolves with work/family.”

“Offer assistance in transitioning to a career or during a job transition.”

“Do MBTI, focus on what you can find passion in for your career.”

“Provide more outreach/services for graduates.”

“Go beyond the typically resume and interview tips to teaching real world tools that will keep me from feeling defeated while I am adjusting to life after graduation”

“Alumni associations and career centers need to get outside their comfort zones and provide better support with career counseling before and after graduation.”

For Alumni Associations

“I enjoyed college but feel they should help students more with their careers after college. As students we invest so much in our education that I feel colleges should invest more in their students’ careers after college.”

“We have sister schools that maybe could have helped. Expand beyond your own alum.”

“Work on post graduation involvement and counseling, transition from school environment to work environment - developing skills needed to succeed in workplace (b/c it’s definitely not the same skills used in the school environment).”

“Students need to be aware of the services while attending. In addition, the emails I rec. are directed at donating funds not really speaking about the services that are offered.”

“Organize local chapters for alums who no longer live in the area.”

“Cultivate relationships with students before they graduate. And become more relevant when engaging students.”

“The Alumni Association can help with employment information.”

“You already have our cash - now stick with us! The quarterly magazine doesn’t really speak to opportunities and continuing education.”

“Alum association can offer more of a variety of events.”

“Alum Associations are far more influential than career development centers. I suppose more infrastructure, more “Meet and Greets”, more direct mentoring/shadowing.”

“The Alumni Associations could work harder to connect with their graduates before graduation”.

“Provide more young alum events with reduced price tags!”

“The alumni associations should reach out more to graduates in states other than the ones in which their universities reside. Once you leave the state, the only time they seem to get in touch is when they need donations.”

“The Alumni Association website is hard to navigate and it is frustrating. We are scattered across the country but the center seems to focus on local events only- not cool.”

“It is more important than ever that students and grads have more support in the transition from college to the workforce. The Alumni Associations need to strengthen their transition support.”

For Career Centers [continues on next page](#)

Comments Continues from...How can the Alum Associations or Career Centers improve?

For Career Centers

"I wish I had more career counseling. I am back in school in order to begin a second career. Getting "real life" experience made me better understand the type of career I wanted to pursue. I went from high school to a four year college and it wasn't until I had my second job after college that I realized I wanted to pursue another career."

"Perhaps by posting what opportunities the career centers have to offer to let people know how they are able to assist graduates in a career path and a job in that field of interest."

"Increase number of career fair type activities."

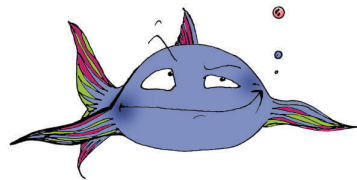
"Getting students comfortable to different interviewing styles."

"Career centers should offer internship opportunities for all students and not just those already enrolled in a major."

"Having people from various businesses talk with the students- about jobs, the work, work hours, demands, and what they are looking for in employees."

"Career centers should also be available to graduates who have become unemployed. They should have the resources there to help graduates improve their marketable skills."

"I found that that career counselors were very unorganized but enthusiastic. I had little assistance from them in finding a job or even in what career path to choose. Ultimately I spent years as a waitress before I was discovered by my current boss."



Final Blog in Alum Series: Earning Interest May Earn Donations?

My nephew called to tell me about his new car and I shared my first car experience at 16: I told him that during the first night I kept looking out the window to verify that it was real. He laughed and admitted that he had done the same thing. When we disconnected, I thought about the “honeymoon period” we tend to have with people and things, and how exhilarating it is at first until it morphs into feelings far less interesting like responsibility.

Several cars later, I never did a “reality check” after bringing them home, because to me, they were just responsibility wrapped up in transportation. My first car represented freedom since I didn’t have to borrow my parents’ car, or wait for a ride after school or from work. It was my car and I was driving on cloud nine until responsibility swerved in front of me. Understanding responsibility is relatively straightforward when it comes to financial matters; you either execute with timeliness or not, based on your maturity and means. On the other hand, the ability to respond when it involves relationships, personal or professional can be more complicated.

This became clear when an alumna told me how her excitement after graduation led her and friends to visit their Alma Mater frequently the first year. After the second year, the excitement waned and it became a hassle and they lost interest. Four years drifted by and they hadn’t participated in any activities. When I asked her to define hassle, she said the eight-hour round trip, her job, boyfriend, the football team and possibly her three-legged dog or hog-I wasn’t sure because she was talking in circles. The short version was “she hated to miss it, but she **really** didn’t **want** to go.” Not only was her excitement gone, it was completely lost and she wasn’t trying to find it.

This conversation colorfully summed up the main challenge of Alma Maters after graduation, RELEVANCE. How do they matter and keep the relevance while their Alums’ lives evolve? What I wanted to say to the Alum with the three-legged hog was, “you got a life, right?” It made sense that she would go back to the familiar when surrounded by the unfamiliar. She graduated, moved to a new city and didn’t know many people. So she bonded with her college friends and they all went back to the familiar, their Alma Mater. That was fun until they became familiar with their new lives and perhaps realized that the value of those alumni activities had faded away, to the point that it no longer outweighed the efforts required to stay connected.

Familiarity and value are strongly connected to donations. A friend curtly told me that she didn’t donate to her university because she didn’t feel a connection. She donated and supported a number of charities from cancer to heart associations, but donating to her Alma Mater was not an option. She received a great education and paid a great sum to get it, NEXT! To her, it was black-and-white, but that is not always the case. **We asked Alums:**

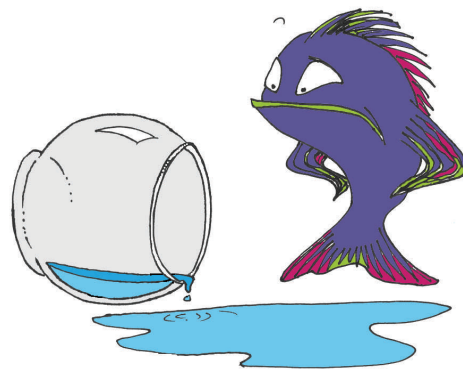
Have you ever donated money to your college? Why?

56% - Yes and 44% No

Most of the **Yeses** were people who received some type of scholarship themselves, so they wanted to pay it forward with the next generation. Other reasons stated were pride in their college, a way to give back, a way to show support to a particular program like the drama club or another club in which they were involved. [Continues on next page...](#)

Most of the **Nos** didn't provide reasons. Maybe, like my friend, it was an emphatic No!, followed by NEXT. The few that provided reasons said they couldn't afford it, their school didn't need it, or paying their student loans is their donation.

Again, **Mattering** appears to be the overall challenge for colleges/universities to connect and stay connected with their Alums. In our previous blogs, 88% of Alums said they did not participate in their alumni activities while 66% said they did not feel that their Alma Mater supported them beyond graduation. For some Alma Maters, defining **Mattering** will be harder than creating fire with a wet match, but for others it will light a fire under their creativity to reach out and become relevant on different levels outside of their current view. Because loyalty is not inherent upon graduation, especially with the millennial generation: it is **EARNED**.



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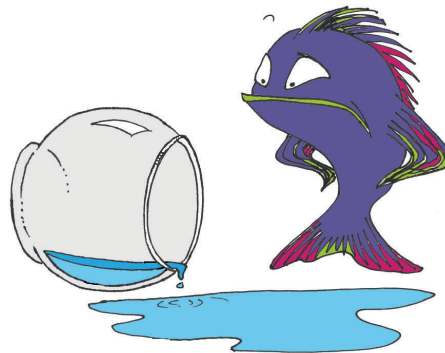
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If you have a question or just want to stay connected with us to discuss or explore career decisions, please feel free to connect us via:

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The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year.

- John Foster Dulles