

IVY PLUS CONFERENCE

The Future of Alumni Networks: Change and Disruption

Introduction and Housekeeping

Elite Education and the Knowledge Economy

The Rise of Global Alumni Brand Leverage

A Fundamental Transition in Alumni Behavior

Alumni Relations: From Top-down to Frameworking Models

Case Studies: Cal, Perry, and the View from the Top

Tactical Responses and Priorization

Strategic Implications

- **The presentation takes a four-step approach: Change dynamics – organizational issues – case studies – tactical and strategic implications**
- **Reflections on comprehensive, broad, multi-factorial change require a broad and diversified information basis**
 - **Alum**
 - **Volunteer leadership**
 - **Research on multiple higher education management fields**
 - **Client projects**
 - **Active knowledge sharing**
- **Acknowledgements go to Andy Shaindlin, Charlie Melichar, Chris Thompson, Ian Moore, and Lou Alexander**
- **The presentation has been posted at www.illuminategroup.com (homepage, under June News Ticker)**

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SETTING THE SCENE: ELITE EDUCATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

- **We are transitioning from a service industry – which is still following industrial organization paradigms – into a global knowledge economy**
- **This transition is changing economies, education, and individual life trajectories in deep, unprecedented ways (short of armed conflict)**
- **Higher education is a key beneficiary of this transition. It is moving squarely into the center of people's lives**
- **Consequently, differentiation pressures across multiple dimensions are going to increase even more. Elite education will profit from this trend**
- **As a result, elite education credentials will become much more important, competition for access will rise, and alumni networks will become a crucial source of competitive advantage**

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- **Membership in elite alumni networks will continue to experience a sustained rise in day-to-day utility and thus socio-economic value – creating a positive feedback loop back into the institution**
- **This has been happening for a long time, but the relevance, power, and reach of elite networks has grown and will continue to do so**
- **This is not a purely academic phenomenon. Corporate and special purpose private networks follow the same logic and trend**
- **A recent but rapidly growing dynamic is the true globalization of networks which calls any differentiation of domestic/global into question**
- **One day U.S. News might very well rank not just colleges, but also alumni networks. One possible metric should be “global brand leverage”**

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- **Alumni behavior is changing along multiple lines, driven by broad societal, workplace, technology, and global forces. There's no turning back**
- **As a result, behavior is already turning towards issue-based, self-organization and self-mobilization paradigms. Alumni do not hesitate to leave their alma maters behind if they think it serves them better to do so**
- **Technology has been a strong amplifier of these dynamics. The ubiquity of communication tools, coupled with the rapid development of networking platforms, will result in even more changes**
- **Already, social and professional platforms such as Kiva, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. significantly shape and enable alumni networking regardless of institutional efforts**

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- **Alumni behavior has been changing along multiple lines**
 - **Self-organization**
 - **Privatization (i.e. focus on personal issues)**
 - **Issue-based behavior**
 - **Micro-support models**
 - **Rationalization of relationship building**
 - **Others**
- **With engagement levels down in some elite networks (e.g. giving rates, club participation) a clear indicator is in place which points out that traditional alumni programming does not suffice to provide alumni with adequate relationship value**
- **Alumni relations programming thus needs to morph to take on the changed alumni behavior landscape – and program for what is to come in order to stay or become relevant again**

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- **University of California & Cal, Advocacy program, 2004. A best practice case study regarding mobilization of alumni and supporters in a highly effective and efficient manner through an e-mail lobbying campaign**
- **University of California & Cal, pretty much everything else since 2004. A dead online community, egocentric management communication, amateurish presidential outreach, and ignorant donation requests are part of a worst practice situation**
- **Perry's World. The most far reaching and quite clever "theft" of elite academic brands online between 2006-08. A case study illustrating institutional intransigence and alumni self-organization**
- **MIT's View from the Top. A best case study of transitioning to a framework, coaching-centric model. Ultimately, alumni leadership can take over program development**

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TACTICAL RESPONSES

Programming models which require significant changes

- **Internal alumni communities**
 - **Internal communities simply make little sense from many strategic and pragmatic angles. Instead, alma maters should create a "directory plus" model which focuses on verification, information integration, and brand protection**
- **Traditional event-based programming**
 - **Events still matter, but in different ways than in the past. Instead of providing a fleeting and rare relationship touch point they now must act in a multi-leveraged manner**
- **Traditional uni-directional communication**
 - **Alumni Relations Offices have to focus on providing alumni with opportunities to attain maximum, multi-dimensional information leverage (knowledge acquisition, relationships, economic transaction, etc.)**

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- **The role of alumni relations will have to change notably - it will move (more) into the center of institutional delivery and strategy setting**
- **Since this process is driven by exogenous forces the question is not whether one likes this change dynamic or whether it can be avoided, but how to make sure alumni relations takes a leadership role in this transformation process**
- **Alumni relations staff will have to take on new roles and shed old ones. New roles: Community manager, network coach, knowledge disseminator. Old roles: Event specialist, anyone with a narrow role focusing on low value processes, low skill positions**
- **Alumni relations staff will have to be trained more broadly, in more technical ways, and be given more organizational freedom**
- **This transformation process does not require more resources as such, but a strategic reallocation**

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