Alumni Volunteer Leadership Conference 2015
Friday, 18 September 2015 – Harris Manchester College

Session notes:

Welcome address
Led by Guy Collender – Head of Alumni Communications and Marketing
(10.00am – 10.30am):

• Please see presentation file.

Working with Recruitment and Admissions
Led by Caitriona Woolhouse – Head of Student Recruitment, University of Oxford
(10.30am – 11.15am):

• Please see presentation file.

Workshop: Effective Online Communications
Led by Guy Collender – Head of Alumni Communications and Marketing; and Joby Mullens – Alumni Networks Officer
(11.45am – 12.45pm and repeated 4pm – 5pm):

• Please see presentation file.

“Your experiences”:

• 8 out of 11 groups represented at the morning workshop send email newsletters – the majority of which are sent out by the group’s secretary.
• Emails from the Oxford & Cambridge Club of Geneva are sent out by different members depending on the subject of the email.
• OUS Manchester described challenges they face regarding who they can contact in their area due to data protection legislation.
Workshop: Effective Online Communications (continued)

- **OUS Gloucestershire** asked whether it would be possible to be sent matriculation dates on the data that is sent out for alumni in their area from the Alumni Office. [Unfortunately data protection legislation prohibits the sharing of matriculation data]
- **OUS Paris** noted that it helped in getting responses to email communications by sending out reminder emails – ideally one about a month before the event, one a week before and one a couple of days before.
- Older and younger people behave in different ways when responding to online communications and this should be taken into account when sending out communications.
- **OUS Manchester** reported that they get around 90 people attending their events – they attributed the low number of drop-outs to the fact that they ask for a deposit from anyone wishing to attend.
- The **Oxford & Cambridge Club of Geneva** said that they avoided a deposit system as it requires more administration. The club asks people to pay on the day. If people continually avoid paying, they are removed from the membership list.
- **OUS Gloucestershire** reported a problem with ‘bounceback’ emails (a rate of about 10 per cent of the emails they send out) [please inform the Alumni Office of any bouncebacks and email address changes].
- Groups would be keen to receive promotional materials for events such as the Boat Race (such as the ‘I’m Dark Blue’ flags and the logo to use) [please contact the Alumni Office to request these].
- Six groups out of 12 that were present have a Facebook page.
- Two out of 12 groups present at the session have a Twitter account.
- Different groups reported different committee members as being responsible for sending out communications – from those groups where the President or Secretary may be responsible, to those groups which had someone on the committee who was solely responsible for communications.
- **OUS Hertfordshire** asked for guidance on what to post/what not to post online and advice on dealing with libellous comments – who is responsible???
  [Response from Georgina Brooke, Digital Content Editor: We receive a high volume of comments on Facebook, of three main types: i) general positive comments from people about Oxford or aspirational comments about wanting to attend Oxford; ii) spam posts advertising various things; iii) genuine questions.
  We will not respond to type (i) due to the volume of comments and the fact that most of them do not require a reply from us. For type (ii), we will hide posts on the first occasion they appear, since they make the page look badly-administered and untidy, and ban users the second time they post this content.
  We will respond to type (iii) – the genuine questions, within 24 hours. Usually these are admissions-related and the undergraduate team can help out, but the digital team will monitor daily to tidy up and respond to Facebook comments.]
Workshop: Effective Online Communications (continued)

[The University’s social media guidance is online at: po.st/facebookstrategy]

- **OUS Manchester** reported that they struggle to connect with younger members through their communications.
- Oxford & Cambridge groups would benefit from the use of a joint Oxford and Cambridge logo specifically designed for their use, as per the Oxford Alumni Networks logo. [A joint logo has been designed and is currently in the process of being approved.]
- **Oxford10** asked if it would be possible to add functionality to the Oxford Alumni Community website to enable alumni to join Oxford10 from the site. [we will create a link to the alumni groups page on the Alumni Office’s website: www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/networks from the Oxford Alumni Community website].
- Is the large statement about data protection [included in the Volunteer Handbook – Requirements & Recommendations for Sending Postal & Electronic Communications leaflet] required every time a group sends out a communication to alumni? [It’s not compulsory to include such a statement (see below) in a postal communication but it’s certainly good practice]:

**Your data**

*Your data are held securely in the University’s shared Development and Alumni Relations System (DARS), which will help ensure your details are up to date and help to improve our communications with you. The data may be used by colleges, faculties, departments, administrative units, international offices, recognised alumni societies, sports and other entities associated with the University, and agents contracted by the University in that capacity. Full details on how your data are held and used are set out in our Data Protection Statement at www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/data_protection or you can request a hard copy from the address below. Some sensitive personal data may be held in DARS. If at any time you have any queries about the use of your personal data, or no longer wish to receive a specific communication, please contact the Alumni Office, University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford, OX1 2JD, at: enquiries@alumni.ox.ac.uk.*

- Sending out a second reminder for group event invitations does increase the number of respondents and attendees to events.
- **OUS Edinburgh** reported that their most successful event communication was for Christmas drinks – it has always been their best attended event and is easy to arrange also.
Workshop: Effective Online Communications (continued)

- Oxford10 said that when they started limiting the capacity for events on event communications, they found that they had double the number of enquiries – people felt they needed to rush and buy a ticket quickly to avoid missing out. The group stopped organising free events as they found people would sign up for them and then drop out – however, they do try to make their events as inexpensive as possible.

Workshop: Engaging Events
Led by Clare Monaghan – Events Manager, University of Oxford ( Incoming Deputy Director of Alumni Relations)
(11.45am – 12.45pm):

- Workshop notes to follow

Case Study: Reviving an Alumni Group
Led by Andrew Mitchell and Sam Tolley – OUS Gloucestershire
(2.30pm – 3.30pm):

- Sam Tolley initially ran the St Hugh’s alumni group for alumni in Gloucestershire and wanted to make more contact with the University so contacted the OUS Gloucestershire group.
- The then President said that it had been very inactive so Sam stepped into the role of reigniting the group with the support of the Oxford Alumni Office. Sam gave high praise to Joby Mullens for being so helpful, as did the committee.
- The OUS Gloucestershire group was a long established one which still mainly used postal addresses to contact their members. Fortunately there was a willingness to evolve and embrace change amongst the group.
- The group now has committee meetings, Treasury Reports, a new constitution and an AGM.
- Sam kicked off the new chapter in the group’s history with an event at a local historic pub.
- She emphasised a few guiding principles:
  - It is important to make events interesting!
  - Use networks/contacts to find good locations for events.
  - Use local historical venues in your area/local festivals and tours for possible events.
  - Try to establish a regular rhythm of events throughout the year.
• **Case Study: Reviving an Alumni Group (continued)**

- Name badges for attendees are very useful.
- Keep it simple – use PayPal and Eventbrite for events.
- Keep communications timely.

- So far the group has had 400 attendees and guests at a range of events.
- The currency of being Oxford alumni travels far! Can build mutually beneficial relationships.
- It was noted that for events it is important to get public liability insurance. For around 100 people at an event it might cost roughly £100 a year. [The University recommends that alumni groups obtain appropriate insurance for their activities. The University arranges insurance through Zurich Insurance who would be happy to hear from you should you require cover for any of your activities. Zurich’s contact details are:
  Jon Taylor, Risk and Insurance Consultant, Community & Social Organisations, Zurich House, 2 Gladiator Way, Farnborough, Hampshire, GU14 6GB.
  Phone: 01252 387058. Mobile: 07875 886951.
  E-mail: jon.taylor@uk.zurich.com
  The University cannot advise alumni groups in relation to their insurance needs, or the merits of particular insurance policies or insurers. Accordingly, alumni groups are advised to seek their own advice. There are other insurance policies and providers are available. Please note that the above advice on insurance applies to UK groups only.]

- It is useful at events to try and capture email addresses. Also useful to do an analysis of attendance at events to see demographics and what is appealing to whom.
- You can see the group becoming a community and friendships are being built. Enthusiasm is infectious!
- It is important to be flexible.
- The group briefly discussed the restrictive nature of current data protection rules. Whilst the University’s Alumni Office would like to be able to support all mailings on behalf of alumni groups, there simply aren’t the resources to do so currently.
- The group also briefly discussed who should be considered a member of an OUS group. The University recognises people as having full alumni status if they have matriculated into a degree-granting programme.
- Alumni groups are invited to also reach out to those with Associate status and friends of the University (and certainly Cambridge alumni if they are a joint Oxbridge group) if this suits their purposes.
Case Study: Using LinkedIn to Grow Your Membership and Support Your Events Programme

Led by Daniel Kaute – Former President of the Oxford & Cambridge Society of Toronto and manager of the Oxford & Cambridge Berkshire LinkedIn group

(2.30pm – 3.30pm):

- Please see presentation file.

- Workshop participants wanted to know what LinkedIn could do for them, how they could use it to grow their membership or change their membership demographic, promote events and also the security surrounding it.

- Daniel spoke of his experience of using LinkedIn to grow the membership base of the Oxford & Cambridge Society of Toronto, which was formed in 2009 and was previously two separate societies – one for Oxford and one for Cambridge, each with about 400 members.

- In combining the groups, they decided to look at what their mission was:
  - Networking.
  - Helping each other.
  - Giving back – via, for instance, scholarships.

- At the outset, the society had 800 alumni on their database and was sending out communications via Gmail. The disadvantage of this was that Gmail has a limit of 500 people you can email to at one time.

- The Society was keen to get new members so decided to set up a LinkedIn group.

- LinkedIn was seen as a source of new members that the University may not know about – ie: when alumni move to the area but don’t inform the University or their college.

- Daniel explained that LinkedIn could help to attract younger members (particularly professionals) – although warned that they are busy so you may not get a great response! On the plus side, if you locate 1,000 new potential members through LinkedIn and 10% come to an event, that means 100 extra members.

- The Oxford & Cambridge Society of Toronto’s LinkedIn group now has c. 1,445 members. Overall the society has about 2,000 active members from the 1,400 or so members it has email addresses for and the 1,400 or so LinkedIn members with an average age of about 50.

- By contrast, the relatively recently-formed Oxford & Cambridge Berkshire LinkedIn group has around 193 members. The group has identified about 4,000 potential members on LinkedIn in the area though. Daniel cautioned that it is time intensive to search and then connect with alumni in the area and then invite them to join.
Case Study: Using LinkedIn to Grow Your Membership and Support Your Events Programme (continued)

- **How to search LinkedIn for alumni in your area...**
  - Click ‘Connections’, then ‘Find Alumni’.
  - Click on ‘Change School’ and type in ‘University of Oxford’.
  - Click on ‘search’ – this brings up about 123,500 results.
  - You can narrow your search by region by clicking on ‘add/search by region’.
  - Other search examples:
    - Oxford alumni within:
      - a 50 mile radius of Nice, France – 12 results.
      - a 50 mile radius of the SK6 postcode in the UK – 850.
      - a 100 mile radius of the SK6 postcode in the UK – 1,873.

- **THEN.....**
  - If you are interested in a particular person you can link up with them by clicking ‘connect’ and sending them a message. You should check their profile before making contact. (Daniel said he found the group got a 50% response rate using this strategy).
  - Once they have responded to your message you can ask them to join the group.

- **How to manage a group on LinkedIn....**
  - When someone requests to join the group you can check their profile and accept or deny their request (approve/decline/decline & block).
  - You can then start discussions where you can promote specific events (i.e: pub nights).
  - Event management websites such as Eventbrite [note: the CEO of Eventbrite, Kevin Hartz (Univ, 1992) is an Oxford alumnus and a member of OUS Northern California] are useful to provide a link to sign up for events. (The Berkshire group has used the platform to host successful pub nights in Henley, Reading and Whitchurch.).
  - With Eventbrite you can find out data information such as gross and net tickets sales, who is attending an event and export such data to a spreadsheet.

- A LinkedIn group should ideally be used in conjunction with the group’s own database, University data and a Facebook group to reach the largest number of alumni.
Case Study: Engaging with Current Students
Led by Christine Fairchild – Director of Alumni Relations
(4.00pm – 5.00pm):

- This particular session was designed to delve deeper into some practical examples of ways in which alumni groups engage with current students.
- **OUS Hertfordshire** undertakes outreach to local schools. They recently ran a session with a contact from Balliol College. Their advice included:
  - Promote Oxford to state sector not just private.
  - Write to Heads of Sixth Forms in the local area.
  - Invite student ambassadors to help dispel the Oxford myth.
  - Lead a Q&A session for staff, students and parents.
- It was noted that Fresher’s Events have been very successful in creating bonds between the local group and students heading off to Oxford.
- **OUS Cornwall** raises money for bursaries to help cover student travel costs for summer vacation projects. These are voluntary contributions from group members over and above the cost of a ticket to an event.
- The group discussed the opportunity for alumni to serve as career mentors to students. This led to a wider discussion about alumni volunteerism and the increasing interest on the part of alumni to give back to the collegiate University in some way.
- Christine Fairchild described the way in which Yale University had restructured its alumni relations engagement strategy to include a very strong focus on community activism. This seems to resonate strongly with alumni who are looking to get involved in something more impactful through their university affiliation.
- It seems to be the case that younger students want to engage in the public realm; they have a strong social conscience.
- It was noted the Alumni Office needs a platform to promote alumni willing to speak/share skills sets/ experience. The University is good at asking for donations but not in mobilising the skills and talent of alumni [Alumni Office to investigate].
- The University of Cambridge...:
  - Has a Volunteer Relations team.
  - Measures time given of volunteers.
  - Has a Welcome to Cambridge pack with a defined volunteer role description.
- Future ideas:
  - Invite undergraduates to OUS Events?
  - Award prizes/recognition for student engagement– students and recent leavers are driven for awards to go on their CV.
  - Run “How to Network” events for students and recent leavers.
- Admissions web page containing information on link colleges for specific regions:
  [http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/open-days-outreach/events-students-teachers/resources-teachers/link-colleges](http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/open-days-outreach/events-students-teachers/resources-teachers/link-colleges)
Report on Annual Update Survey/Wrap Up
Led by Joby Mullens, Alumni Networks Officer
(5.00pm – 5.30pm):

- Please see Annual Update Survey Report 2015.

Christine Fairchild led a discussion on the ways in which the Alumni Office might better support the work of the groups:

“How can we help you?”:

- By letting us know when academics are coming to our area.
- Presenting the essential information for all alumni groups in one page; (i.e: guidance on public liability, data protection)
- Collecting more email addresses for alumni so that groups have more contact details for individuals in their area.
- By looking into updating the data sharing agreement which alumni group officers are asked to sign before receiving data on alumni in their area.

Challenges:

- Data protection is likely to get stricter
- Alumni must opt-in – offering an opt-out is not sufficient
- The University’s Alumni Office is working closely with Legal Services on this issue
- Groups can help by sending on any updated email addresses they have to the Alumni Office, with the consent of the individuals.

Christine and Joby thanked the group officers for attending and for all of their efforts.