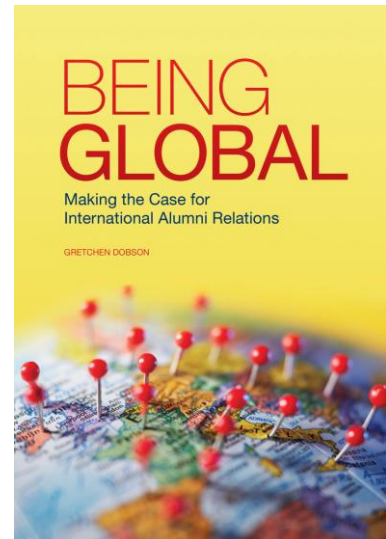


International alumni relations: Considerations for 2012 and beyond

This article is adapted from Gretchen Dobson, *Being Global: Making the Case for International Alumni Relations* (Washington, DC: CASE, 2011). Used with permission. The UK launch of the book was on 17 October.

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I wrote *Being Global: Making the Case for International Alumni Relations* because there is a compelling argument that we should care about how international alumni are engaged. The beginning of the book presents international alumni relations as a simple math equation: graduates plus opportunities can equal positive results if stewarded in strategic ways. It also asks if we are willing to change the way we think of international alumni relations and to invest in a continual learning process. We must help ourselves and others understand the relevance of international alumni relations in light of future administrative and educational practices, demographic changes, economic trends and globalisation.

The theme of collaboration is present throughout the book. Schools, colleges, and universities are becoming more collaborative internally and externally. Within organisations, advancement staff are working with admissions offices, academic departments and student services. A move towards more integrated planning could lead to greater efficiencies in budgeting and communications. Externally, institutions are in 'safe position' to work with other peers and external partners. Your alumni are your alumni. You are not selling cars or designer jeans.

International alumni relations is about building unique and personal relationships with individuals who have chosen to study at your school. Consider options, risks and rewards carefully when choosing to work with another school, open a satellite campus, or commit to a regional fundraising

scheme. Decide on a few collaborative goals for the next few years, measure the effectiveness of the effort, document progress, and be open to modification.

It's not too late to begin an international alumni relations programme! There are many tips to consider today, and *Being Global* contains dozens of tips to get you started. The six considerations below help to think proactively about changes and new opportunities in the decade ahead. The first five considerations are in the book. The sixth is new and a topic I will research and consider in my doctoral work over the next two years. I believe the timeliness of the situation in the UK today presents ramifications from which other countries can observe and learn.

Consideration 1

Campuses need to coordinate all international engagement.

From undergraduate international recruiting schedules, study-abroad programmes, to faculty sabbaticals, the points of engagement require planning, communication and collaboration. Having an ability to assess international engagement in a comprehensive way also provides opportunity to make changes, reallocate resources, and better align the international practices of campuses to overall mission, academic opportunities and advancement priorities.

The recession, however, means that some universities are cutting back international efforts by eliminating International Office staff and disseminating resources to functional areas such as study abroad or assisting faculty with international grant applications ([Chronicle of Higher Education, 3 September 2010](#)). These institutions are decentralising the management of international affairs.

My recommendation is to establish and maintain a coordinated effort. It will be harder to catch up on 'being global' if you step out instead of thinking about how to stay afloat during downturns.

Consideration 2

International advancement officers will perform multiple functions

Along with the implementation of campus-wide international programmes, schools and universities will require professional staff working abroad to wear many hats: admissions, alumni relations and development. Skilled, knowledgeable, and entrepreneurial professionals with more than one major staff responsibility help keep international programmes operating efficiently. The

breadth of resources and information available to international alumni, parents, prospective students and guidance counsellors should be much more comprehensive. Institutions that embrace hybrid roles or the idea of cross-training across functions have an opportunity to develop their employees and international programmes.

Begin cross-training with interns and new hires. A new programme such as the CASE Europe-HEFCE Graduate Trainee Programme ([CASE Currents, September 2010](#)) provides year-long paid internships in fundraising offices of several UK universities. Interns learn about prospect research, donor relations, and are given an opportunity to discover strategies for fundraising domestically and internationally.

Consideration 3

Some international alumni relations programmes should generate revenue

Successful international relations programmes require regular attention, adequate funding, and new ideas. Working with international constituents costs more per person than working domestically. Today's economic and demographic conditions create a license for alumni relations to begin to think about some programmes as a business.

Modify existing programmes to coincide with faculty travel or major conferences. Create opportunities to introduce new leaders to international alumni by planning regional receptions and mini-symposia. These are general initiatives designed to attract a wide range of alumni, parents and friends. They also are usually free events and/or designed to underwrite much of their costs.

Revenue-generating programmes will become part of the alumni programming menu for more universities in the next decade. Travel-Learn programmes have already turned small profits for years. Such programmes have offered alumni, parents and friends an exclusive opportunity to travel the world with fellow graduates and learn from faculty escorts. Through this access, travellers are given access to information (about the trip's subject matter and the institution) for a small premium.

Consider the major demographic shift for the next decade: baby boomers are retiring and, even with our latest recession, there are opportunities to engage educated and mobile alumni in various parts of the world. A 'back to campus' experience for a reduced fee and schedule can be both attractive to the alumni

and profitable to the sponsor. The programme needs to be facilitated professionally and personally, and bring forth available resources abroad. Decide what defines premium service for your institution and its alumni and think about the contributions your alumni have already made. This may be very different for private vs public institutions; however, going through the practice of considering profit-generating programmes is worthwhile and helps redefine your programming strategy.

Consideration 4

Traditional communication methods will persist

Even with the rise of social media and the growth of new technologies such as telepresence rooms, international alumni relations will continue to benefit from traditional means of communication. Globalisation produces opportunities for universities to open up campuses abroad and some governments actively recruit educational investment. Initial meetings between key decision-makers in these partnerships will not be conducted through a shared calendar on Wikipedia or through a Facebook wall. Formal communications will continue to lead parties through negotiation and sharing meals, or 'breaking bread', will probably never go out of vogue. The internationalisation of education requires us to adhere to tradition.

As institutions in 2011 look ahead in the next decade, decisions about what forms of communications to uphold will occur. Some methods, such as in-person meetings, and telephone calls, cost more but may be valued more. It also depends on who is involved. Educational attaches and major international donors may expect a high-touch approach. Providing a balanced communications plan so that all alumni feel valued and involved with their *alma mater* is essentially the goal.

Consideration 5

Internationalisation of higher education will produce alumni with non-traditional affinities

This consideration is based on the following predictions: 1) the United States will have more international community college graduates, 2) more international exchange programmes and executive learning programmes will be created, and 3) more countries will export higher education opportunities. Community colleges have an opportunity to create more relationships and financial support abroad and, as my book describes with a case study of the University of California at

Davis, even short-term educational experiences with research fellow or corporate education should result in a new cohort of alumni. Education is a recession-proof business. What changes are the types of institutions and the methods of delivery such as on-line instruction. Non-traditional affinities may become the new norm by the year 2021!

Finally, here is my latest preoccupation:

Consideration 6:

There will be measurable impacts of the UK higher education tuition scheme on international alumni relations policies, practices and programmes

The global recession is impacting higher education funding policies around the world. In October 2010 the UK government indicated it would reduce subsidies for public higher education as of July 2012. To make up the gap in funding the government is recommending to increase tuition from the current ceiling of £3000 to £9000 per year. The difference will be passed on to the student, the institution, or both.

Most UK institutions do not have the endowments or historically-strong philanthropic programmes in place to make up the funding shortfall. I predict, almost universally, more institutions will rely on private funding mechanisms for ongoing advancement support (for the institution and students). One of the primary sources for private funding is individual fundraising.

Private fundraising is made possible through strategic and purposeful engagement of an institution's alumni, parents and friend constituencies. Specifically, international fundraising practices vary in the length of time it takes to secure a gift to the time it takes to build a meaningful relationship with constituents abroad. For UK institutions, however, time is a critical element in the next year. How institutions approach international prospects may signal both a response to addressing the funding changes as well as a commitment to developing new and stronger existing relationships with their international communities.

My doctoral study will address the financial implications of the UK tuition hikes in the first year of implementation. A diverse sampling of institutions will be surveyed about what they are doing to engage their international constituencies in response to decisions to raise tuition and/or supplement the decreased public support through their own private funds.

The findings from the research will be instructive to both UK institutions and to other regions (such as Europe and Asia) that find themselves at least a decade behind the US in terms of engaging private sources to build affinity, participation and support. When it comes to international engagement, the research will show how, why and if UK institutions are setting new standards in response to new tuition policies. I am now recruiting institutions to participate in the formal research period during the second half of 2012.

Conclusion

The first five considerations above are derived from dozens of interviews with international advancement peers from around the world. The best practices shared and lessons learned lead to continuous improvement in our profession. The main points are working with integrated campus teams; delivering excellent service, resources and cultivating new donors; building in a revenue stream to international programmes; maintaining interpersonal authenticity in an era of interactive media; inviting the involvement and support of new constituents; and studying how tuition changes produce changes in institutional strategy for engaging international alumni. By reacting to these forecasts and formulating predictions in the decade ahead, international alumni relations programmes will move ahead and prosper.

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