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## Community Relations: Experience of U.S. Universities

The object of this case study, University relations with community, was chosen for its obvious urgency for Russian higher education. A number of problems that Russian higher education faces at present in connection with the topic under discussion can be pointed out. First of all, it is the discord between the current socioeconomic situation in Russia and the way Universities function. Functioning as closed systems in an open democratic society, Universities are being unable to promote values of society, which is one of the functions inherent to education. Secondly, state budget is decreasing dramatically and doesn't suffice for universities to function properly. Thus most universities manage to keep balance on money from tuition fees mostly, which makes higher education more expensive for students and in many cases loses the universities the possibility to maintain the quality of students on a high level. Finally, because the market of higher education is growing rapidly, universities have been finding it more difficult to attract talented students and a new way of recruiting students has to be found. Developing a system of community relations is one of the ways to solve the above problems.

First of all, interaction with the community is a condition for a University to fulfill its mission. Universities are created for society and there supposed to be a two-way interaction between them and community. Universities produce knowledge and educate people and society as a whole, in many cases they act as supervisors and indicators of many social processes. They give alarm if something goes wrong and use their authority to influence the social development in many important ways. On the other hand Universities cannot effectively function without public participation, feedback from community is necessary for them to identify, what kind of education is expected from their graduates and what knowledge the society needs to pursue the necessary level of development. If separated from the community Universities are found unable to fulfill their mission.

Besides it is community relations that allow Universities to raise additional funds for development, which makes Universities less dependent on tuition. Finally communities is a source of students for a university, and public relations proved to be the most effective way of recruiting students.

US Universities have a long lasting tradition of community relations and community participation. They have found many effective ways to cooperate with community and benefit from this cooperation to the most. Not only do they raise funds and recruit students, they draw ideas and professional support of their alums and friends.

This case study focuses on University Alumni relations as part of overall public relations. Approaches and instruments Universities use in their work with the community are described. The case study was written on the example of Kennesaw State University,

Georgia (KSU), additional examples are drawn from the practice of University of Minnesota (UM) public relations policy.

Some of the questions I'd like to answer in this case study are: How is the work with alumni and community organized? What is the structure of Alumni Association? What goals and objectives does AA achieve? How do alumni contribute to University development and academic life? What does University do to recruit community? What instruments do Alumni relation officers use in their work?

### ***General Structure of University Public Relations***

KSU has an extensive system of community relations on different levels: University as a whole, College, Department, and faculty members. This system includes numerous bodies such as Alumni Association and Alumni Clubs and Chapters, University Foundation, various Advisory and Trustee Boards and other groups. Below some major levels of community relations are looked upon.

The Foundation functions on the level of University. It is responsible for fund raising and managing all the funds the University raises. All funds raised are sent to the Foundation, which then allocates the unrestricted funds to various colleges, departments and university projects according to the University's needs as the Foundation sees them and serves as a treasurer of all University restricted gifts. The Foundation reports to the university president.

Alumni Association (AA) is another University level organization. All members of AA irrespective of their interests are provided with the same services from the University and pay the same membership fees. Additionally alumni may join various clubs and interest groups, which can work with one separate college, realize their own projects, and come up with additional benefits and challenges for their members.

Some KSU colleges and departments have their own independent public relations or alumni relations offices, which carry out independent programs for the community and target the groups of people with a specific focus of interest, including various workshops and seminars for business people and teachers.

Practically each KSU department has its advisory board. A board will join successful professionals and alumni of the college. Advisory Boards may also be established for a separate major. They focus on curriculum and supporting projects of the University department or college, provide advice on the current developments in their field, make sure that the syllabus is kept up to date and students acquire the skills, which will make them a success in their profession. Advisors are carefully selected by other board members to contribute to this goal of the organization, i.e. make sure that the education answers current needs of society.

Community is also involved into University life on a personal level, as it is a common practice to invite speakers to the classroom. Faculty members encourage students to establish relations with professionals in the field of their study and ask them to share their hands-on experience. Faculty members rely a lot on the contribution of community in educational process. This makes the knowledge Universities produce real-life and thus much more valuable.

### ***Mission and Principles of University Alumni Relations***

As was said above Universities have alumni relation offices responsible for alumni relations, their mission is to encourage and foster alumni involvement with their alma maters, using various methods and instruments.

CASE suggested the following principles of their practice:

#### Respect

- Acknowledge and embrace alumni as vital stakeholders in their institutions.
- Serve as an advocate for alumni, representing their interests in working with institutional departments and constituencies as well as the broader community
- Provide alumni with relevant financial information concerning the work of the alumni association and its activities.
- Ensure personal information provided by alumni is handled in a professional and confidential manner at all times.

#### Inform

- inform alumni about institutional mission, goals and programs,
- inform alumni about alumni association mission, goals and programs,
- strive to ensure the mission, goals and programs of the alumni association are consistent with, and support

#### Involve

- encourage alumni to participate in and support the programs, services and events of the alumni association and the institution.
- Encourage alumni to pursue leadership opportunities in the alumni association and throughout the institution.
- Involve alumni – seeking their ideas, input and feedback – in any planning process that seeks to define or modify the alumni association mission or its system of selecting its leadership.
- Encourage alumni to serve in the broader community as ambassadors for their alma mater and for education in general.

### ***Structure of KSUAA***

Alumni relations officers are responsible for encouraging and facilitating AA as a separate non-for-profit organization, joining University alumni and friends.

The membership of KSUAA is divided into three categories:

- (a) regular membership is available to graduates of KSU
- (b) associate membership is available to members of the faculty and administrative staff, former matriculants, and parents of former or present students. Other friends of the College may become associate members upon approval of majority vote of the Board of Directors.

- (c) The Board of Directors by a majority vote may elect as Honorary members any person having rendered some special and conspicuous service of KSU or the Association.

Members of the association in good standing are those who have paid the established fees and/or yearly dues.

Dues and any other fees deemed appropriate and necessary are entitled to voting privileges and to hold office in the Association.

Only members in good standing are entitled to voting privileges and hold office the Association.

The officers of the Association are the president, a First Vice president, a Second Vice-President, a Secretary/Treasurer, the Immediate Past president and an Executive Director. Those officers constitute the executive Committee.

The president presides at all meetings of the association, the Board of Directors and the Executive committee or appoints a presiding officer. The president appoints such committees as are necessary and is an ex-officio member of all committees.

The First Vice-president assumes the duties of the President in his absence and is responsible for planning or activities for the two years following his/her term as president-Elect.

Treasurer is responsible for recording the proceedings of all meetings of the Association; in concert with the Executive Director oversees all banking and financial records of the Association and financial reports.

Executive director coordinates all alumni affairs, business or social, and acts as a liaison between the Association and KSU, he makes sure that the proper notices of all meetings of the Board of Directors

## 2. Goals and Objectives of University Alumni Association

The goals of KSU Alumni Association are

1. to promote the cause of higher education in the state of Georgia,
2. to promote aid and encourage the aims and objectives of KSU by organizing the entire body of graduates
3. to promote their interests in, encouragement and support of KSU by raising funds and administering KSU.

The following objectives can be distinguished:

- recruit students

University Alumni and Friends help to recruit prospective students and improve the student experience. They support the university by being ambassadors for the University's good name, helping spread the word of the education it provides, building pride and spirit, watching for outstanding potential University students in their area, and supporting students with local scholarships.

Community relations is an important means of creating a positive image of the University. Reputation of the institution influences directly the number of students who come to study and the rate of tuition. Public relations is one of the ways to create this positive image and thus get more students, and consequently more talented students.

- attract additional human resources to the university

In addition to promoting the image of the University, alumni are encouraged to participate in University life, through providing additional services to students and participating in University projects.

Alumni act as part of advisory boards to the dean, faculty, and staff to the college. The experience of alumni is highly valued and taken into consideration by most departments, as they advise on curriculum development and improvement.

Alumni provide educational and professional programs and services to other alumni and students, when they are invited as guest speakers to Alumni Clubs meetings and to classes.

KSU has a **residency** program, whereby a successful alumnus is invited to stay on campus for about two weeks and conduct workshops for students. It encourages students' academic work and brings real-life experience into classroom. Alumni can be invited to speak to students on practical topics connected with their major, for example a conductor may be invited to tell art students how to get a job in their profession.

The UMAA is dedicated to promoting and advocating **mentor programs** throughout the University and the Twin Cities community. The UMAA Mentor Connection is not a mentor program in itself. It is a mentor program clearinghouse, which means that it helps enhance existing programs and establishes new ones. The Mentor Connection works in collaboration with UMAA alumni societies, University departments and community organizations. There are 16 different mentor programs with more than 1,500 students and 1,500 alumni participating in the UMAA Mentor Connection.

UM Mentorship Programs are designed to help undergraduate students make contacts in the Twin Cities community by matching students with a successful professional in the field of their choice. It also provides them with an opportunity to enhance their professional skills by gaining knowledge and insight the mentor can offer. Volunteer mentors provide students with valuable insight and guidance, helping the students to develop as new professionals. Undergraduate students who participate in this program are in the early stages of deciding their career path. The guidance of a mentor is valuable to a student at this stage in their education because the mentors assist students in becoming more focused in their career goals and help them develop professional skills they will need as they begin internships and move into the workplace.

In general the goals of mentoring networks are to:

- Provide experienced and knowledgeable role models for undergraduates seeking careers in various fields.
- Provide informal advice and counsel for undergraduates seeking to clarify their career directions.

UM also encourages its alumni to **lobby University interests**. Alumni are asked to contact their state senator and representative on important legislation through UM Action Center. Special action alerts and updates are e-mailed to alumni to call them to be connected to advocacy efforts on behalf of the University of Minnesota. These alerts can direct alumni to take action to effect important legislation that will have a direct impact on the U of M. Alumni call or write to their representative or write letters to the editor.

- Raise funds

While AA are not usually aimed directly at raising funds, they still function in many ways as a fundraising body. Alumni are encouraged to donate for the University. Alumni officers point out that the different ways to donate to the University are:

1. Use university memorabilia to demonstrate affinity to alma mater;
2. Participate in a legislative action alert,
3. Become a member of AA
4. Give back to the university

Individual alumni can make gifts to the University. Alumni Clubs and Chapters support students with scholarships or honor staff and faculty with awards. For example, KSU AA awards a scholarship to a promising senior student in any major annually, KSU Black Alumni Association provides a scholarship to one student of mathematics or science each year. UMAA established the Distinguished Teaching Awards, which include the Morse-Alumni Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education and the Award for Outstanding Contributions to Graduate and Professional Education. Candidates are nominated through their colleges and are selected by the Senate Committee on Educational Policy. The awards include a continuous salary augmentation of \$3,000 to recipients for as long as they serve the University of Minnesota faculty and a five-year award of \$1,500 to the recipient's department for use in professional development activities.

Donations can benefit not only the University but also the donor in different ways. Depending on the type of gift (cash, securities, real estate, designation of retirement plan assets, gift annuity, annuity trust, charitable lead trust, etc.), the donors can acquire tax savings, bypass capital gains tax, etc.

The Universities do their best to provide easy and convenient ways to make a contribution, alumni can make a donation or pay a membership fee on the University web site, or send a check to the University alumni office. Matching gifts from alumni employees are welcome and the companies, who match gifts to the University are recognized in a special brochure.

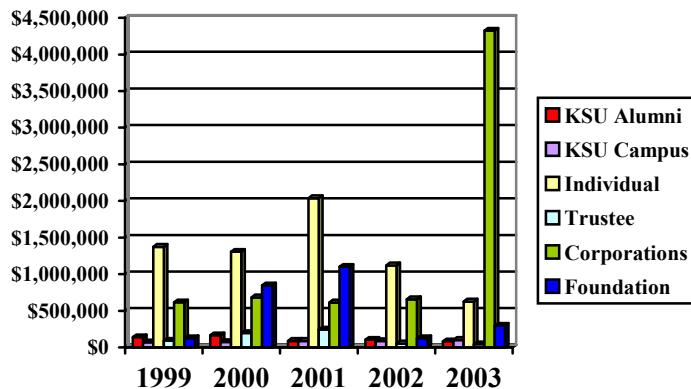
Universities recognize their donors in different ways. A lot of publicity is usually given to those who donate. First of all donors are ranked and their names are listed in alumni magazines and other booklets and newsletters of the University. Donor recognition programs include inviting University friends to various receptions, performances and events also according to the size of contribution.

As was said above alumni are not considered to be the principal donors, however as a rule they contribute a lot to the university. The principal fund raising body of KSU is the

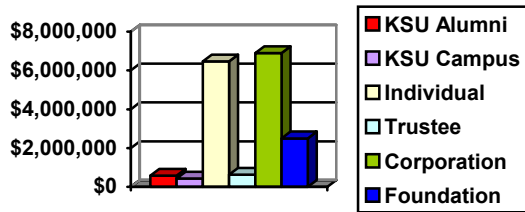
KSU Foundation, other donors are individuals, trustees, corporations and university faculty and staff. From the following it is seen that KSU alumni on average contribute less than any other group of donors.

### Sources of Gifts By Fiscal Year

Source	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	Total, FY 1999-2003
KSU Alumni	\$141,016	\$165,223	\$89,865	\$106,158	\$82,107	\$584,369
KSU Campus	\$70,286	\$73,926	\$89,094	\$87,446	\$103,283	\$424,035
Individual	\$1,374,548	\$1,307,043	\$2,038,722	\$1,120,706	\$627,592	\$6,468,611
Trustee	\$92,475	\$197,472	\$244,504	\$54,665	\$43,326	\$632,442
Corporation	\$617,491	\$683,625	\$614,259	\$658,159	\$4,326,233	\$6,899,767
Foundation	\$126,882	\$848,288	\$1,100,029	\$126,668	\$298,300	\$2,500,167
Total	\$2,422,698	\$3,275,577	\$4,176,473	\$2,153,802	\$5,480,841	\$17,509,391

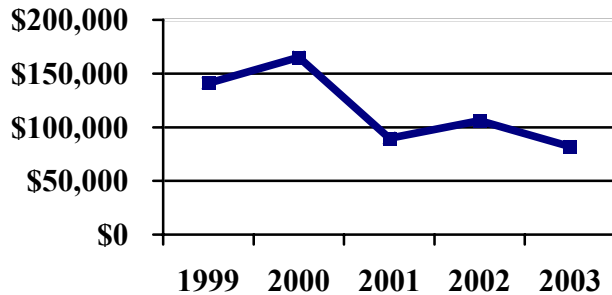


### Sources of Gifts (Total 1999-2003)



The contributions of KSU alumni have decreased over the last 4 years by 58 %, as can be seen from the following graph.

### Contributions of KSU Alumni



### *Ways of Promoting University With the Public*

The main message Universities try to bring to public is that “**The University changes lives and brings success**”, universities do their best to demonstrate their involvement in community life. The universities (1) inform, (2) give, (1) involve.

**Informing** people about what is happening on campus is of importance, through informing Universities try to make people feel they belong to the University.

The ways of bringing the information about the university to the public:

- 1) Communicating through newsletters, mass media, via email, etc.

Universities and separate colleges may publish special magazines and brochures for alumni and friends. An alumni magazine will contain information about University affairs (news, running and successfully completed projects, events, etc.), several student, faculty and alumni profiles. Alumni magazines provide feedback from the University to alumni and donors, as the information is given about the projects supported by alumni and other donors. In case a scholarship or award is instituted by university alumni or other group affiliated with the University, the recipients and their profiles are featured in the newsletter or magazine.

It is a priority of University public relations to keep alumni and friends informed about everything that happens at a University. Everyone who wishes to be included on a mailing list is sent regular emails about University life. If a campaign or project is carried out where community is involved, managers inform everyone participating in this or that way about each single step and achievement of the project. This is done to show that the university values the contribution and that it produces positive results.

- 2) Personal meetings of University staff and faculty with the representatives of community and at various events, organized by the University;

Universities organize a number of regular events for alumni and friends. KSU organizes Homecoming, theatre night and a travel program.

Alumni clubs organize general meetings for college alumni or members of the club. For example, KSU College of Business Alumni Club invites its members for breakfast each month. A part of this meeting is always dedicated to informing alumni about what is going on campus.

It is the responsibility of the University President to represent University to the community. University of Minnesota, for example, has a special office, which plans the president's public appearances.

The example of an event aimed at strengthening the links with community was a set of meeting and roundtables organized by University of Minnesota in Saint Cloud, Minnesota. The action was aimed at raising public interest and involvement in the life of the University in the town 60 miles away from Twin Cities. The president, some vice-presidents, deans and university officials spent a day in Saint Cloud and visited a local rotary club, took part in a round table with the representatives of business of the county, visited the University of Minnesota extension Office and took part in the meeting of the University Alumni Chapter at Saint Cloud. The county has its own university (Saint Cloud University), which they support. However the object of the action was to communicate that University of Minnesota is a successful research institution, different from the rest of the Universities and colleges in the state and it is dedicated to serving the community of the whole state.

- 3) by word of mouth

University image is created through people's personal connections in many ways. The least thing Universities ask from their graduates is to demonstrate their links with the home institution by using the University's memorabilia, by hanging their graduation certificate on the wall in their office. Successful graduates create interest in the University. Alumni, if they are content with their home institution, serve as testimony of University's excellence.

### ***Services the University Provides to Alumni***

Universities invest in their alumni in different ways: by organizing events, by providing them with various services.

KSU traditionally organizes homecoming, theatre night and travel program.

*Homecoming* is a set of events, which are organized for a week each year jointly by alumni and students. An on-campus parade kicks-off the weekend celebration with the selection of a Homecoming king and queen, the Homecoming dance and the annual KSUAA-sponsored home-coming brunch. The annual Alumni Achievement Award winners are honored at the brunch to which all alumni are invited. The festivities are capped off by the Fighting Owls basketball games.

#### *Travel*

Christmas at Callaway Gardens has become an annual tradition with the KSU alumni association, as have sleigh rides, picnics, sporting events, reunions, and extended travel to locations such as New York and Greece. Special events are periodically scheduled for groups off the KSU campus. Alumni association plays an integral role in organizing and planning special trips. Open to all alumni, you can enjoy traveling with other alumni and friends of the college.

#### *Alumni Seminars*

Each quarter the KSUAA sponsors an event for alumni. It may be a guest speaker from the business or cultural community to present a topic of current interest. Whether it be a CPA in winter, a Master Gardener in spring, a lecturer in summer, or a career services professional in fall, all alumni are invited to attend the seminars at KSU without charge.

By working with alumni Universities try to sustain and expend their links with the people, who are no longer students and create a community focused on the University. The recreational events Universities offer are matched by a number of **services** Universities provide to their Alumni and Friends.

KSU offers the following *benefits* to its alumni:

- use of the Career Services Center
- use of the KSU Library
- use of the KSU Computer Labs
- use of the KSU pool, tennis courts, and Wellness Center facilities for alumni and their families
- annual subscription to KSU publications
- newsletters and invitations to special alumni events and activities.

The services may differ from university to university, larger universities cannot afford providing their alumni with the unlimited use of facilities. University of Minnesota, for example, offers multiple discounts for the members of alumni association to use U of M athletics facilities, bookstore, professional development courses, career development, campus club, golf course etc. Alumni Associations also sign agreements with different companies working in the neighborhood, which then provide discounts for the members of Alumni Association. For example membership in U of M AA provides discounts at hundreds of hotels, a car rental company, credit union membership, movie tickets, Broadway shows, video rentals, sporting events, theme parks, ski lift tickets, online shopping, etc.

## **Networking**

Besides benefits and services provided by universities to their alumni, maybe the most important advantage membership in Alumni Association can provide is networking. Alumni Associations consist of a number of clubs, interest groups and chapters.

KSUAA includes Bagwell College of Education Alumni Club, Black Alumni Society, Communication Alumni Organization, Nursing Alumni Club. Alumni join according to their professional and personal interest to support each other and cooperate in the projects they deem interesting. They will invite speakers to encourage professional development and support the university projects they are interested in.

UMAA Chapters join graduates who live in the same county, state or country and help them make the U of M connection in their communities throughout Minnesota, across the United States, and around the world. A Chapter has a volunteer board of alumni and friends. It supports the University and plans spirit, social, and educational events to bring area alumni and friends together and to bring the University to their community. Major events that bring the University to chapter communities include: presidential visits, lectures by University faculty, performances by student/faculty artists, and University updates. Chapters also frequently gather for networking and social events like: family picnics, happy hours, Gopher athletic viewing parties/tailgates, and specific regional activities such as hiking in the Northwest or attending an embassy event in Washington D.C.

UM has a special networking program. Members of the UMAA are part of one of the largest networks in the state. There are over 50,000 members who care about the U of M. The UMAA gives alumni the opportunity to meet and network with these other members at Homecoming, reunions, the UMAA Annual Celebration, and through chapters, societies, etc.

The Twin Cities Business and Community Outreach Program (TCBC) is an effort by UMAA and UM partners to serve as a resource to alumni and their employers. TCBC offers on-site and on-campus programming opportunities for alumni and University friends working at local companies. Since TCBC's inception, numerous businesses have taken advantage of the on-site and on-campus programming including, Cargill, General Mills, Target Corporation, Unisys, etc. The program makes it possible for companies to **get access to an educated workforce** through posting job openings for recent grads or seasoned alumni professionals on JobTrak and linking the to Career Connections "UMAA Internet Job Fair" Web site. The program includes continued professional development for staff. The companies can explore University of Minnesota workforce training and professional continuing education through University College credit degree programs, certificates and non-credit short courses. They get the opportunities of direct dialogue with University deans, faculty and staff and can hear the latest research information from colleges and centers. Company employees are provided with the networking and social opportunities.

## **Services for parents**

Parents are indicated as possible AA members, however KSU does not have any parents on its AA. By contrast UM has a special program for parents. UM designated them as an

important target group. UM has a parents association. They work to assure parents that their children are taken care of and act as immediate contacts in case parents have some questions connected with their child's studies or some problems on campus. UM organizes a special orientation program for parents each year, when they can meet people on campus, find out the necessary financial information, are instructed about the details of psychological transition of their children when they start independent life as students. UM tries to help parents separate from their children, who move into a residence hall. Throughout the year parents are emailed every two weeks to let them know about what is happening on campus, and what kind of support their children might need at the moment.

## 6. Instruments

University Alumni Relations offices may use different instruments in their work.

- Telephone

A regular call-in is done to keep track of alumni. Universities use students to volunteer to talk to alumni about the University, to verify the information in alumni database, suggest a contribution or invite alumni to an event.

- sending letters

The same kind of requests are done by regular mail, together with questionnaires, alumni receive a University magazine and various information about events and discounts.

- database

Universities have extensive databases of all students and alumni, which include personal and contact information of the alum and his/her spouses and parents, information about past and current employments, academic information (transcripts, majors, minors, dates of admittance and graduation, etc.), all contributions and the size of gifts an alum has done to the University. The database is constantly updated, through internet questionnaires, during call-ins and by regular mail.

## ***Conclusion***

US Universities have a well-developed system of Alumni relations and community services. Community interest and contribution is the condition of existence and *raison d'être* of Universities. They create the sense of belonging of alumni, by allowing them to stay at the University and use many of the University facilities, they keep alums informed of what of what is happening on campus and create a special environment for them to be willing to give back to the University. US universities are indeed centers of social life. The rule they follow is "If you want to influence, cooperate".

I suppose the experience can be applied to Russian Universities as well. By developing community relations Russian Universities can:

- join the modern trends of social and economic development;
- attract additional human resources to conduct strategic planning and develop;
- raise funds for the University to be able to fulfill its mission more effectively;
- become open and transparent;

- contribute to the development of civic society.