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INTRODUCTION

It has been nearly five years since I wrote "Engaging Continuing Education Alumni" for this publication and several additional years prior to that since I began talking at various UCEA meetings about the fundraising potential of continuing higher education. During the ensuing period I have been through an institutional capital campaign, helped raise nearly $2.5 million dollars earmarked for school projects, succeeded in making friends and supporters beyond my wildest dreams, and failed miserably in accomplishing the fundraising goals established for the school. This article reflects on the lessons learned by a fundraising novice whose school was engaged in an institutional capital campaign for the first time. With apologies to Hunter Thompson, fear (unfounded) and loathing (unproductive) were but two of the many emotions stirred during this process.

The most important lesson involves the comprehensive nature of the fundraising enterprise. The commitment begins within your organization: employees from receptionists to adjunct faculty need to understand the importance of the fundraising agenda and be aware that each interaction with a "client" may have a significant effect on achieving fundraising goals. Additionally, various stakeholders external to the continuing education unit need to be cultivated for immediate impact. Of primary importance is convincing your own institution to buy in and commit to your fundraising agenda. But the list must also include corporations and foundations, which almost exclusively represent immediate fundraising sources. Simultaneous attention needs to be paid to alumni, who require significant cultivation and who represent the medium-range potential for generating resources. And

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lastly and perhaps most importantly, you have to engage current students now for long-term fundraising success.

SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES

The School of Continuing Studies, a degree-granting school of the University of Richmond, is organized into three divisions. The Evening School offers associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees and certificates and graduate certificates at nights, on weekends, and online as well as on site at three community colleges around the state and at two police/fire academies. The school currently serves 1,200 part-time adult students equating to 515 FTE's. The Office of Community and Professional Education offers non-credit programs and courses for enrichment and professional development to 5,000 to 6,0000 participants each year, both on campus, online and on site. It also includes the School Technology Program, which serves 12,000 students annually in more than 100 independent schools in seven states, and an Osher Institute for Lifelong Learning (500 members). The Office of Summer Programs manages the university's summer school for both traditional and nontraditional students and is the home for two residential Governor's Schools for gifted and talented students from across the Commonwealth. The school employs twenty-four full-time and sixteen part-time staff, eight full-time faculty/program directors, and several hundred adjunct faculty members. Gross revenues exceed $7 million dollars annually and the school must be self-supporting and make an annually negotiated contribution to overhead. Lastly, the school, founded in 1962, currently numbers more than 2,000 living alumni from its various degree programs.

FIRST-EVER CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The University of Richmond launched a $200 million capital campaign in 2000 and included the School of Continuing Studies for the first time in the school's thirty-eight-year history. While several endowed scholarships existed, the school lacked most of the traditional endowments typically associated with an academic school. It also lacked its own facility. Thus, the school proposed the following priorities:

- $2 million for an endowed chair;
- $1 million for a distinguished professional-in-residence;
- $500,000 for distinguished fellowships;
- $625,000 in need-based scholarships;
- $150,000 for program endowments; and
- $6 million for a building

Out of these, the university chose a campaign goal of $3.625 million that included an endowed chair, a distinguished professional-in-residence, and scholarship support. The university campaign ended in 2007, exceeding its goal. While the School of Continuing Studies failed to meet its objectives, raising more than $2 million—the majority of which was designated for scholarships—by most accounts the efforts outlined below were deemed overwhelmingly successful, helping to create the relationships essential for long-term fundraising success.

TRANSACTIONAL NATURE OF THE CONTINUING EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Individual giving remains the single largest source of dollars to institutions of higher learning (Giving USA 2006). The preponderance of major donors come from the ranks of alumni loyal to the institution generally or more frequently to a specific school, department, program, or a specific individual, most often a cherished faculty member. Unfortunately, this has not been the case within continuing education (CE) because of the transactional nature of the experience for most CE students. This is not to say that our students are not grateful for the opportunity they have been provided to complete their education; my experience has been quite the contrary. But unlike traditional-age students, who see the four years spent on college campus as transformational, adults categorize education as but one more "transaction" they make in their busy daily lives, a transaction fitting the same paradigm as shopping at a store. They have had to pay for their education, often out of their own pockets, and feel less compelled to give something to an institution that provided something for a fee.

The upshot is that the propensity of alumni to give to their alma mater needs to be cultivated from the first "touch" as a prospective student deep into their post-retirement years. That continuing education should create a passion for lifelong learning is a given throughout our profession. What is less obvious but no less compelling is that continuing education can also create a passion for lifelong giving, not just to one's alma mater but to the larger community as well.

The fundamental part of the equation, then, is figuring out how to engage current students in the life and traditions of the school prior and up to graduation. Countless tactics are available to help develop ongoing connections with current students, which can loosely be characterized as "honoring" and "involving." Some examples that have proven particularly effective follow:

- holding a separate commencement ceremony, complete with student speaker, alumni speaker, and featured speaker;
- creating a student government association and providing members with meaningful opportunities to serve;
- hosting affinity (major- or industry-related) breakfasts throughout the year, involving current students, faculty, and alumni;
- hosting an annual honors convocation and banquet (SCS Night) to recognize the accomplishments of students, faculty, and alumni;
- holding an alumni induction ceremony on the day students pick up their caps and gowns.;
- making use of student testimonials for use in print, radio, and television ads as well as on a website;
- creating numerous ways to recognize students, ranging from book awards for academic accomplishments to creating roles for students, such as mace bearer at commencement.;
- providing need-based scholarships and other financial awards to students.

Three of these events—alumni induction, SCS Night, and commencement—are multi-purpose, with significant emphasis placed on helping students make the transition—at an emotional level—to alumni status.

Each of the measures listed has substantially increased student involvement and ultimately student commitment to the school. However, while student engagement holds the greatest potential for financial support over time, efforts need to be concentrated elsewhere for more immediate impact.

ENGAGING ALUMNI/ALUMNAE

Student engagement is a necessary but long-term strategy whose significant results, unfortunately, are likely to be years, or even decades away. So effort must be simultaneously focused on engaging alumni in the life of the school. Several have proved particularly effective for us:

- sending an annual letter/report to alumni;
- creating a separate alumni association;
- creating an advisory council to provide both giving and nongiving opportunities for alumni to contribute;

- using alumni testimonials in print, radio, and television ads and on our website;
- providing opportunities to speak, including at commencement.

It is also critical to provide a wide range of giving opportunities. In our case, endowed giving begins with $2,500 book awards, increases to $10,000 for major annual awards (distinguished faculty member, for example), and goes up to $25,000 scholarship minimums. By creating meaningful ways for donors to begin giving, they can gradually move up the donor scale, a process that is necessary and time-consuming.

SEEKING CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION SUPPORT

In an article published in the *Continuing Higher Education Review,* Mary Walshok developed a useful matrix of funding sources that includes beneficiaries, stakeholders, investors, and philanthropists (Walshok 2001). Absent a long history of alumni engagement, what is clear is that stakeholders and investors, those companies and organizations and communities that indirectly benefit from our programs, pose the greatest opportunity for short-term generation of funds. This can take many forms: corporate underwriting opportunities, membership fees, sponsored research opportunities, or grant support. These sources of funds are usually episodic and related to creating and/or delivering specific learning opportunities. Our Center for Leadership in Education, for example, has attracted significant corporate dollars to support leadership training for teachers aspiring to move into school leadership roles. It is only when we tap into philanthropists, however, that we have the potential for transformational giving.

Several strategies are available to the dean in terms of creating visibility for the unit among various external funding sources. Among the most effective, and unfortunately the most time-consuming as well, is service on nonprofit boards, which exposes the dean to corporate, political, and community leaders in settings that help foster relationships independent of a particular agenda.

ANSWERING KEY QUESTIONS

Professional fundraisers can provide unending anecdotes about mistakes made during the cultivation process. One of the most common set of errors involves being unprepared to respond to queries from eager prospects. The professionals will be the first to remind you that lost opportunities may be lost forever. So the goal becomes preparing answers to anticipated questions. During all of my interactions, two questions were recurring.

The most basic and universal question was, "How can I help?" I say basic and universal in the sense that the case for support in continuing education is particularly compelling and appealing to our prospects. And our response must be equally compelling—how the donor's engagement of time, talent, and/or resources will contribute to advancing what is already a compelling case. There is no facile answer. Instead, the request must fit the capabilities and interests of each individual and, perhaps most importantly, must passionately articulate what the prospective donor's particular contribution will mean to you, to the school, and/or to the university.

The second most common question is related to the first: "Why do you need my money since you already have $XXX in the bank (endowment)?" The response must first address the somewhat technical nature of endowments, which are very often misunderstood by those outside of higher education. The response must then emphasize needs unmet by current resources, including endowments, and then focus on the opportunity at hand. Ultimately, the response must be tailored to the individual and cover the capacity of the prospect, whether it is $50 or $50,000.

CONCLUSION

Capital campaigns provide continuing educators with an opportunity to affect learners for years and to provide long-term stability for their respective units. To be successful, a comprehensive approach needs to be developed, educating faculty and staff on their respective roles in achieving fundraising goals, while simultaneously focusing on current students, alumni, and external stakeholders and beneficiaries, including corporations and foundations.

The necessary prerequisite for success is inclusion in the university's overall strategic plan, which guarantees some priority in the capital campaign. Nonetheless, and particularly if your alumni have been excluded or existed on the periphery of prior campaigns, a critical component is the development of a separate fundraising capability independent of the university. This becomes essential given the length of the cultivation process, which must begin with your current students, who exist outside of the purview of most advancement operations.

The cultivation process is both time-consuming and expensive, with significant results often years away. But the payoff in terms of visibility and financial stability will be well worth the effort.

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