

Academia's Obsession with Universities Ranking - Part 3: Building Academic Reputation thru Alumni

We are witnessing massive changes in higher education, due to Covid-19, although its impact has been seen in each & every corner of our lives, but academic feels the heat more severely. Thus, massive, and sustainable changes in higher education is need of the hour. We are also aware that, it was already a cumbersome task to manage and build an academic career, which is likely to become more challenging after covid-19 for the existing or fresher students or academicians.

I am not exaggerating, if I say that alumni are the backbone of the institution, they are the reflection of the academic quality and ethical values of the institutions. They are also the reflection of its past, representation of its present and a link to its future.

It has been witnessed, that the strong alumni networks of various universities, whether it is personal or professional global alumni networks, they prove to be an ambassador of their alma mater as they support institutional priorities at home and abroad.

Nevertheless, due to Covid-19, that decreased the mobility which resulted in devastating impact on the lack of movement and conferences which also hampers the networking and impact the research, collaboration, academic output, and innovation. The lack of networking due to current scenario necessitate creative models for maintaining, or building, new relationships for mutual benefits.

Many of the alumni are willing to 'Give-Back' to their alma-mater as a sign of their gratitude and affinity towards the institution. That is the bottom line, and there are various stories backing this notion too. Such as various alumni associations, host official events and academic delegations, all resulting in a stronger recruitment pipeline, academic partnerships, new memorandums of understanding and a few more key donor relationships to steward and support.

The types of alumni engagements are local alumni chapters and clubs, international alumni chapters and clubs, affinity groups which are set-up by alumni around professional affiliations such as law and business, personal interests or college associations. Also there Affinity group that connects alumni who are active members of academe around the world.

Alumni Networks for Reputation

It is beyond doubt that students and alumni have much to gain from alumni engagements. *For instance*, alumni within related research areas can mentor each other, early career scholars and graduate students can develop support systems that can last their entire careers. A new academic alumni affinity group can also reach out to international graduate students and postdocs who went home during covid-19 and are not able to return to their host campus. The same groups can even help more seasoned academics with career transitions.

Institution can build-up their academic and employer reputation with the support of alumni engagement

Connecting alumni academics and administrators can lead to new partnerships and lay a new and strategic global donor pipeline. Partnerships might result in new research grant bids and trans-disciplinary research, which could link alumni in academe with faculty members of the home institution. With help from the Study Abroad office, it is possible to research academics and their location to see if they can help build virtual and hybrid partnerships for today's reimagined study abroad programs.

Moreover, alumni are the interface between the institution and the current and prospective students. They have trustworthy knowledge to share with current as well as prospective students and do campaigning for the institution like none other. The concerted efforts done for alumni management are well reflected in building a strong and long-lasting brand of the institution. ***Following are the ways to build and enhance academic and employer reputation of the institution-***

The career profiles of the notable alumni should be listed on institution's website and other IT platforms. This would be inspirational for future and current students. Besides, alumni success stories give more weightage to the institute. Every passing out student has his own unique experience about how institution has contributed in shaping his career. Thus, sharing alumni success stories on institute's website will add value and enhance overall reputation.

Also, alumni turned to promising entrepreneurs are the real pillars for institutional reputation building. The Alumni Promotion News should be spread through social media like Face Book, Twitter, LinkedIn, alumni magazines and institutional websites, which offer an appropriate platform where news regarding achievements and accolades received by alumni is shared and spread. This activity will increase the attachment for alma matter and in turn strengthens the institutional brand. Last but not the least, inviting alumni as judge for competitions and as a guest-speakers, will not only connect them with their alma mater but also connect the current students with outstanding alumni, thus enhancing the institutional image.

The Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University adopts various practices to enhance and build academic and employer reputation, alumni engagement is one of the most important model.

In lieu of this, various Online/offline events are organized involving alumni such as every month zoom webinar from different specialty such as Medicine, Dentistry, Architecture, Engineering etc. These webinars were promoted through social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, snapchat, Facebook, hashtag alumni etc. These efforts would impact better ranking in QS, THE and as well as in Webometrics.