



Preparing Students for a Lifetime of Giving

Students and young alumni feel more connected to each other than to the institutions they attend(ed). Younger donors and volunteers give time, talent and treasure out of a sense of this interconnected community and extended “family” rather than a traditional sense of charitable obligation. This is why it is so important for the university to help build this community – and be perceived as an integral part of it. In contrast, when the university is perceived as apart from, inimical to, or disdainful of this community, its members will feel no obligation or desire to give back to university. Also, young donors are more results-focused in their giving – they want to know with specificity what results they “get” when they give.

Building an interconnected community of students starts when they are accepted at university – if not before. The actions of the admissions department, departments providing services to students, and offices of student life can positively (or negatively) effect the subsequent efforts of development and alumni relations. Give students email addresses for life, create life-long virtual communities, and support student activities that foster community. This goes beyond institutional help setting up or maintaining student activities to include personal involvement of faculty and administration in student lives (see Residential College Masters at Yale, or involvement of Yale Deans and Provosts cheering on university sporting teams). Teach students that the reason they had such a good school experience is because of the generosity of their predecessors. If they are not having a good experience, fix it. If the community of students feels divorced from the university, there is little for which the school can effectively solicit.

Make alumni part of every student’s interconnected community. Have successful alumni mentor and teach current students in a variety of settings: on campus and off, in large groups and small, in official courses and casual get-togethers. The on campus, small group, casual get-togethers are particularly important in establishing intergenerational connection and providing models of alumni success that include coming back and giving back. It’s important that alumni speak about what they’ve done since graduation. It is essential to *demonstrate* that giving back time is as important as giving money – and that one’s relationship with alma mater does not end when one graduates.

Have students interact with alumni – as many as possible. Discuss with students what it means to be a good alumnus or alumna. Have students involved in alumni solicitations, thank-yous for donations, or both. Have recipients of named scholarships connect with donors. See <http://giving.yale.edu/news/giving-yale/students-celebrate-giving-elihu-day>.

Those who give large gifts begin by giving early. Certainly, not every early giver will become wealthy enough to donate a fortune, but the importance of reaching current students and young alumni cannot be overstated. Among those who make a gift of over \$500,000 to Yale, the vast majority made their first monetary gift within 5 years of graduating. This is why Yale has focused in recent years on educating students about the gifts that make their Yale experience possible, and on executing a broad-based Senior Class Gift campaign.

Involving current students in fundraising – both as donors and as solicitors. If you groom well-trained, dedicated alumni-to-be who reach out to their classmates for an annual fund gift, you’ve won half the battle.

The Senior Class Gift. At Yale, students finishing their undergraduate education are asked to pledge their first contribution to Yale during a three-week campaign in February of their senior year. Graduation is typically in May. Consequently, sentimental attachment typically runs high as students begin their final semester. To build the habit of giving, the act of giving something is more important than the amount.

The Senior Class Fundraisers are fellow students. The people doing the asking (Class Agents) are other Senior Class students who personally know the people whom they ask for gifts. The askers are volunteers who know the givers because they live in the same Residential College. Effort is made to have Class Agents solicit people they know best. Class Agents are given training in how to ask, especially about emphasizing participation. Following graduation, Class Agents may solicit gifts from their classmates for decades.

Use friendly competition to drive increased participation. Students at some schools (such as business schools) thrive on competition *per se*. Students elsewhere may respond to competitive “challenges” against rivals.

Competition among Residential Colleges (dorms). At Yale both undergraduate social life and non-varsity intramural athletic competitions are based on the Residential Colleges – this fosters a friendly rivalry among them. During the Senior Class Gift Campaign, the seniors in each Residential College “win” a matching gift if they achieve certain goals or challenges, including reaching participation targets, increasing participation over the previous year, and raising the largest dollar amount. For information on matching gifts see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matching_gift.

Competition “between” classes. There are also challenges for the entire Senior Class with respect to raising more money or increasing participation over the previous year’s graduation seniors. With this friendly competition, participation has risen from 83% in 2004 to 97% in 2014. Total dollars raised has also increased.

Online competition. For an online, game-like approach to fundraising see vimeo.com/52150696 from SSE-Riga.