New Jersey Institute of Technology

Report of the President’s Task Force on Alumni Relations

February 11, 2010
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President Robert A. Altenkirch

Dear President Altenkirch:

As requested in your charge to the President’s Task Force on Alumni Relations, we have prepared the attached observations and recommendations for your consideration. We believe that our proposals are broad, comprehensive and ambitious, and will significantly advance not only the relationship between New Jersey Institute of Technology alumni and their alma mater, but also the mission and standing of the University itself. Our report reflects a vital and shared goal: that NJIT and its alumni must strengthen their allegiance to one another and that alumni expand their critical role in helping NJIT achieve its ambitions.

We are grateful for your leadership, your commitment to this endeavor and your support of our work, and thank you in advance for your careful consideration of our conclusions.

Respectfully submitted,

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EXEUCUTIVE SUMMARY

The President’s Task Force on Alumni Relations recommends that the following be officially adopted by the Alumni Association of NJIT as statements that best reflect its Mission and Vision:

**Mission Statement**
The Alumni Association of NJIT serves the university and its alumni by engaging as many alumni as possible in the life of the university, beginning as students and extending throughout their lives.

**Vision Statement**
The Alumni Association of NJIT is a single, cohesive, and inclusive network of alumni that works to advance the welfare of NJIT.

For many years, alumni relations at NJIT was a work in progress, moving from a period of limited prospects and negligible productivity to a dramatic reorganization in late 2004 and a fresh start. Alumni relations today is much improved over what it was in 2004 when only 50 alumni participated in on campus programs over an entire academic year. Today that number is approaching 1,000. The 2009 alumni relations audit recommended that the President initiate a process to develop a new five year plan that would surmount the lingering challenges of the past and promote the Alumni Association of NJIT as the university’s partner in the future. The Task Force on Alumni Relations was formed to develop this plan. The goal of the task force has been to identify the means to dramatically increase the number of alumni involved in NJIT.

The Task Force identified the following major recommendations from key areas of focus:

1. **Structure of the Alumni Association:** Enhance the Alumni Association structure to better systematize volunteer recruitment and advancement.
2. **Strength and number of alumni cohorts:** Identify new alumni cohorts to provide increased opportunities and add structure to existing cohorts to make them more effective.
3. **Student and young alumni engagement:** Develop a structure of transition for alumni from student matriculation, through graduation, professional careers and retirement – a lifelong engagement.

The Task Force makes the following plan implementation recommendations:

1. **Vetting:** We recommend that the President circulate the Report to a representative array of university stakeholders, including alumni leaders, for the purpose of eliciting additional input.
2. **Implementing:** The President should move forward with the recommendations he supports quickly and with conviction so as to emphasize the university’s commitment to a new era of alumni relations. He should designate a small team selected from the Task Force, numbering no more than seven, and including the Director of Alumni Relations, and empower the team to guide the implementation process.
3. **Timetable:** We recommend that all accepted recommendations be put into play within a period of three to five years.
4. **Informing the Alumni Body of Changes:** The Task Force recommendations and progress to date should be announced to alumni in general with follow-up reports as warranted. We recommend also that the President mark the occasion with a major address or paper announcing a new era of alumni relations.
5. **Charter documents:** The current Alumni Association Charter Documents should be revised to reflect accepted recommendations.
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I. MISSION AND VISION

The Task Force recommends that the following be officially adopted by the Alumni Association of NJIT as statements that best reflect its Mission and Vision:

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II. INTRODUCTION

For many years, alumni relations at NJIT was a work in progress, moving from a period of limited prospects and negligible productivity to a dramatic reorganization in late 2004 and a fresh start.

By almost any measure, alumni relations today is much improved over what it was in 2004 when only 50 alumni participated in on campus programs over an entire academic year. Today that number is approaching 1,000. In 2003, a Task Force similar in mission to the current Task Force met with a facilitator from the eAdvancement firm to devise a new strategic plan that would significantly increase alumni involvement. The plan it produced has led to a re-energized Office of Alumni Relations and most recently a new Alumni Association of NJIT with increased and more vibrant activity.

In February 2009, the same consultant from eAdvancement was invited to return to NJIT after six years and re-evaluate the Alumni Relations program. The evaluation concluded that the biggest, most-pressing need is to grow NJIT’s Alumni Association to facilitate a broader base of alumni participation and to empower it as a networking agent for alumni and the University alike. In addition, eAdvancement’s 2009 audit recommended that the Office of Alumni Relations should increase its presence on campus and thereby encourage others on campus as agents of alumni engagement.

The audit recommended that the President initiate a process to develop a new five year plan that would surmount the lingering challenges of the past and promote the Alumni Association of NJIT as the University’s partner in the future. The Task Force on Alumni Relations was formed to develop this plan. The goal of the task force has been to identify the means to dramatically increase the number of alumni involved in NJIT in the many ways that alumni elsewhere are involved in their alma maters.
III. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

No review of alumni relations at NJIT could begin without acknowledging the many strengths of the current program. University leaders include the Alumni Association as a critical part of the University community. Talented and dedicated alumni leaders devote untold time and energy to the Alumni Association and to the University as a whole.

Perhaps the most profound challenge is that NJIT lacks a culture of alumni engagement. For many reasons, NJIT missed opportunities to attach itself to and engage with its students years ago (e.g., historically a commuter school, Newark location contributing to a drive-in and drive-out mentality, first-generation college students putting themselves through school or even “night school” while working, etc.). Those missed opportunities amplified themselves through the decades. Culture change is difficult and slow. It can only be influenced to a minor extent from above. True culture change comes from within the culture and fights an uphill battle against inertia. We write this to encourage future efforts that focus on the heart of the issue: influencing and managing culture change.

Some of the issues observed are:

- The basic building blocks of an effective alumni relations program are now in place, but historically have been under-developed or benignly neglected.

- New graduates have little awareness of their opportunities and obligations as alumni, and there is inadequate structure for expressing their loyalty to NJIT.

- The Alumni Association does not have a meaningful role in University life and has not had one for much of its history.

- The University lacks a broad base of alumni support of the types present at other universities.
IV. MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force identified the following major recommendations from key areas of focus:

1. **Structure of the Alumni Association:** Enhance the Alumni Association structure to better systematize volunteer recruitment, encourage leadership development, and accommodate future growth.

2. **Strength and number of alumni cohorts:** Identify new alumni cohorts to provide increased opportunities and add structure to existing cohorts to make them more effective.

3. **Student and young alumni engagement:** Develop a structure of transition for alumni from student matriculation, through graduation, professional careers and retirement – a lifelong engagement.

1. ENHANCE THE STRUCTURE OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

The Task Force felt it was essential to recommend enhancement to the organizational structure of the AANJIT in order to sustain an expanding organization of alumni groups (cohorts). As the Alumni Association is currently configured, the board might be expected to expand to 100 members or more in the next few years as new cohort groups come to be represented – too large a governing body for efficient decision making, without an expanded vertical hierarchy. The recommended organization is shown in the following diagram. It is comprised of three major parts.

- A **Board of Directors** limited to twenty members which includes the Board’s officers and other members elected by the Council.
- A **Council** with 100 members or more which includes at least one representative from each of every individual chartered alumni cohorts. The representatives of similar cohorts on the Council (such as the 70 representatives of individual class cohorts) would select a single representative to be a member of the Alumni Association’s Board of Directors.
- **Alumni Cohorts** which include all chartered, recognized alumni clubs and organizations.

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**Alumni Association Pyramid**

- **BOARD** — includes officers and members
- **COUNCIL** — includes representatives of Alumni cohorts
- **COHORTS** — includes all chartered (recognized) Alumni groups
Board of Directors

The AANJIT would continue to be governed by a Board of Directors with executive responsibility for the affairs of the AANJIT and operating in partnership with the Office of Alumni Relations and its Executive Director.

The Alumni Association Board would be made up of no more than twenty members, including the Executive Director of the Office of Alumni Relations, who would serve as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Board. The primary requirement for election by Council members to the Board should be skill in the core functions of alumni relations. Those core functions are defined as the following:

- cohort activities,
- on campus programs and services,
- communications,
- education, and
- technology.

Board members should represent all NJIT alumni in their deliberations and not serve just as the representatives of particular cohorts. The Board should not be a parliament of chartered interest group delegates, rather it should reflect the diversity of the alumni body and function with a commitment to the development of the whole University.

The Board would consist almost exclusively of the chairs of standing committees (eg. Regional Clubs, Corporate Clubs, Classes). The exception would be the officers of the Board who serve as ad hoc members of such committees. Each chair would be elected by their peers based on their proven ability and experience in that particular core activity, as well as the capacity to serve the entire alumni constituency. Board assignments should be based on experience and expertise.

Board members are the volunteer partners of the Office of Alumni Relations. The Board should have the following primary responsibilities:

- to assist the Office of Alumni Relations in setting alumni relations priorities,
- to determine goals and policies of the Alumni Association,
- to host the annual meeting of the Council,
- to manage the volunteer leaders that make up the Council, and
- to advise the University’s President regarding alumni relations.

The President of the Board of Directors acts as the elected leader of the alumni body and its official spokesperson. The President, holding a two-year term in office, would preside over all official meetings of the Board and the Council. The board’s President and/or the President’s designees represent the AANJIT at all events, where a presence is warranted and where there is an opportunity to build partnerships. The President of the Board assists in evaluating the efforts of the Office of Alumni Relations, but does not supervise the office in any way. The President does have a supervisory and mentoring responsibility for alumni volunteers.
The Task Force believes that it is not the role of the Board to manage the Office of Alumni Relations, or the services it provides. By the same token, the Office of Alumni Relations executes alumni relations programs with the alumni volunteers for the entire alumni body.

Alumni Council

The Task Force recommends that a Council be formed, the purpose of which would be to increase the number of experienced alumni involved in the Alumni Association. The Council would consist of a senior representative from each and every chartered cohort. The Council’s size would be determined by the number of chartered AANJIT organizations and could number well over a hundred when fully developed.

The Council would not have any governing, legislative or parliamentary role in alumni relations. The following are the primary functions of the Council:

- to assemble once a year at the Annual Council meeting to elect members to the Board
- to provide opportunity for alumni leaders to meet, network, and learn from each other
- to provide opportunity for alumni leaders to meet the University’s President
- to provide a significant annual alumni presence on campus

The Alumni Council’s annual meeting, organized by the Alumni Association’s Board, would update the University leadership on the activities of the AANJIT and its Board, brief Council members on University agendas, and engage them with the University on a variety of the key intellectual and educational issues of the day.

The Annual Council Meeting would include training workshops and programs where Council members could share best practices and mentor their successors. It would expand the number of talented alumni visible to University leadership. This annual meeting could also provide an occasion to recognize, honor and thank alumni for their ongoing support in a way that is highly visible to the entire University community.

AANJIT Board members would be chosen from Council members tested through their experience in affiliated activities. The face-to-face interaction of Board members with Council members would provide a pipeline for the selection of future Boards. Expanding the leadership corps in this manner and bringing it into contact with institutional officers would produce positive engagement that would benefit the entire alumni community.

In order to provide increased opportunities to NJIT alumni, terms on the Council should be limited to a maximum of a three-year period, renewable for an additional three-year period while representing a given cohort group.

The Task Force also recommends that the existing President’s Alumni Advisory Council should be renamed to eliminate confusion with the new Alumni Council. The current President’s Council should be oriented exclusively toward fund-raising and be administered through University Advancement’s fundraising staff, not the Office of Alumni Relations. Failure to do this might compromise the identity of the new Alumni Council.
The third, and largest, component of the AANJIT would be the Alumni Cohort group. This would be comprised of all of the many chartered cohort groups, existing and new. It would include most any alumni group who shares a common interest relating to NJIT. The goal over the next three to five years should be to reach a total of 100 alumni cohorts. Currently there are approximately 23 functioning cohort groups.

Members of each cohort are the most effective recruiters of their peers and should have real decision-making roles within their organizations. Each group should become self-reliant and able to support and govern themselves; funding their own programs and electing their own officers. Cohort groups would be required to have a representative who would serve a definite term during which he/she would be a member of the Alumni Council.

Each alumni cohort would be subject to policies outlined in Alumni Association Charter Documents including the use of the database and mailing lists and the use of the NJIT name and logo.

2. EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN ALUMNI COHORTS
The second recommendation of the Task Force is to develop specific programs to increase the number of alumni cohorts and to train them to be effective, robust members of the AANJIT. The Office of Alumni Relations would establish an ad hoc committee to initiate this process.

Alumni, as is the case with students, should be free to form affinities with NJIT through whatever vehicle they deem desirable. The more cohort groups there are, the more likely alumni are to get involved.

A streamlined process for chartering such groups should be developed. The Office of Alumni Relations and the AANJIT should provide a template for their organization and operation, and the necessary basic training and guidance. Limited resources for special needs and opportunities, such as supporting the formation of a new fledgling chapter should be made available.

Two Primary Alumni Cohorts
Two existing alumni cohort types, Class and Region, deserve special attention. This would be provided, in part, through representation on the AANJIT Board.

Class
Class, or year of graduation, offers an easy way of organizing the alumni body and should be strengthened as a basic cohort. Class already exists as a vehicle for alumni activity, mainly in the form of five-year anniversary reunions. A systematic effort should be made to structure each class with a set of officers to serve five-year terms commensurate with their five-year reunion cycles. The leader of each class would automatically be a member of the Alumni Council. Classes should be encouraged to do more between reunion years to develop class involvement and increase reunion attendance. This and other initiatives should originate from the new Board, preferably through a standing or ad hoc committee charged with developing a system and a template for encouraging class development.

Reunions have grown impressively in recent years, but they should be encouraged to grow still further through more direct involvement of more alumni. This should occur particularly in the
planning stages. The Office of Alumni Relations currently defines an 18-month planning process for the Reunion of each class. The AANJIT should actively encourage alumni to embrace this planning process from its outset and to recruit more members within the ranks of their class in the process.

We recommend that the AANJIT Board’s current committee on reunions become a standing Reunion Committee of the Board and that it review over the course of the next academic year ways to continue to build reunions, with emphasis on advance planning and broader involvement. The Committee should develop a core program that will continue to build Alumni Reunion Weekend into a festival of University life.

There are a number of interesting reunion ideas in place at peer institutions. These should be reviewed by the standing Committee and various ideas considered at NJIT. There is particular opportunity in developing additional intellectual content, including pre-reunion class travel trips that would include NJIT faculty who could present on topics related to the destination. There is also the possibility of including the graduating senior class in Alumni Reunion Weekend, to begin inculcating in seniors the notion of a reunion tradition.

Although Reunion gift projects was not within the mandate of this Task Force, we suggest that reunion giving should be managed separately from the reunion event planning committee. Each effort should be pursued by separate groups of alumni acting in concert with either the Office of Alumni Relations or the Office of Development. Reunion giving drives annual giving at many institutions and should enjoy every advantage, but coupling planning and giving can work against reunion attendance and does not always stimulate increased giving.

Region
Regional chapters or regional representatives should be available to every alumnus. We recommend that the current committee on Regional Clubs become a standing committee of the Board and that it review over the course of the next academic year ways to expand the chapter network. Its premise should be that wherever NJIT alumni are active and wish to develop a Chapter organization, they should be encouraged to do so.

The goal should be to have chapters or regional representatives where the number of alumni in the region is sufficient to sustain a chapter, throughout the nation linked together through effective communications and through periodic contact with the AANJIT, Office of Alumni Relations and University leaders. Depending on the number of members actively involved in a chapter program, in addition to the typical social events and faculty speakers a group might also consider Admissions recruitment efforts, Career Mentor programs, and/or Athletics event attendance.

Each chapter, where there is sufficient number of alumni to warrant a chapter, should have a minimal structure with an official leader who will serve for a specific term and become a member of the Alumni Council. The new alumni Board should in turn provide initiatives through the standing Regional Chapter Committee charged with developing a system for encouraging regional development. The AANJIT’s Committee should develop a template for chapter activity and implement a periodic training and recognition program for chapter leaders.

Large chapters, where there are significant numbers of alumni, should be visited regularly by a senior leader of the administration or faculty. Indeed, the President’s travel schedule should feature a minimum of six to eight visits a year to regional chapters deemed important regardless of size, and
should be set as far in advance as possible to optimize planning and attendance. The Office of Alumni Relations should develop a cadre of prominent, appealing faculty speakers for alumni groups anywhere.

Other cohort types
Other alumni cohort types should also be targeted and represented on the AANJIT Board. Most prominent among these are an alumni admissions network and college or academic department network.

The Task Force suggests increased alumni involvement in University recruitment and admissions through an Alumni Admissions Ambassadors Network. This expansion, particularly among young alumni, can bring the University to the attention of more prospective NJIT students and attract better students to the applicant pool. It can also begin to develop young alumni into a lifelong volunteer partnership with their Alma Mater.

The AANJIT would expand its efforts in recruiting alumni volunteers for this purpose. Volunteers would act as good-will ambassadors and if properly trained by Admissions Office staff could be utilized to conduct initial interviews as they are at other schools. With on-line aids, their distance-training might be a possibility to consider. They would not participate in the final admissions decision-making process; the Office of University Admissions would retain full responsibility for admissions decisions, policies and practices.

To visibly commit the AANJIT’s attention to this effort, we suggest that a standing Admissions Volunteers Committee be established by the AANJIT Board and that the Committee review, by the end of the summer of 2010, ways to expand the role of volunteers in the admissions process. Research should be undertaken to learn from the number of other institutions who have similar successful operations in place.

Although the University does have some history with other alumni cohorts, the effort has been random to some degree and disconnected from both the Alumni Association and Alumni Relations; limited to within the silos of colleges, departments, and programs. Some of these non-traditional cohorts may offer the strongest binds to alumni through their student experience at NJIT. Examples include:

- Academic departments
- EOP
- Athletic teams
- Greek life
- Residence life (e.g., Laurel Hall north wing; Cypress Hall 3rd floor)
- Vector, WJTB, Theatre
- Favorite class or professor (e.g., Osama Eljabiri’s Capstone course)
- Alumni of the same high school
- Student government
- Work-study (HelpDesk employees, Campus Center employees, etc.)

Within the last five years, the number of affinity points utilized by Alumni Relations has increased by recognizing various NCE academic departments, soccer alumni, fraternity/sorority alumni, recent
graduates, corporate clubs, and alumni who have passed their 50th Reunion year. However, in this
day-and-age of self-organization, online social networking, and data mining, NJIT should be leveraging
every possibility to allow alumni to self-describe and self-organize by any affinity point of interest to
those alums. New mindsets in data and relationship management, as well as new digital tools (3rd
party software) and protocols to mine and manage “the Social Graph” of our alums, are required to
accomplish this.

3. INCREASE STUDENT AND YOUNG ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT
The third major recommendation is the promotion of an increased student and young alumni
engagement. Alumni relations should begin with current students. By the time they graduate,
students should be a part of the AANJIT. They should be inculcated with a sense of membership that
will encourage engagement for the rest of their lives. By virtue of having chosen NJIT, entering
freshmen should assume a lifelong relationship that both benefits and obligates them. NJIT must
begin early to inspire in its students, even as freshmen, a pride in the University that prepares them to
be active alumni.

The Task Force recommends that the AANJIT Board establish a standing Alumni-Student Relations
Committee structured with an official student leader who will serve for a specific term and become a
member of the Alumni Council. The Committee should convene a forum consisting of individuals
who are most knowledgeable about student life on campus including student leaders, Deans of the
Colleges and representatives from the Office of the Dean of Students, Office of Admissions, the
Athletics Department, Career Services, and Student Life. The forum will explore opportunities for on-
campus and regional events that will increase student awareness of alumni.

The forum should establish a structure of transition from senior to alumnus. Again, the successful
programs of peer institutions may provide multiple examples of how this can be accomplished.
Consideration should be given to existing University customs and traditions as possible areas of
opportunity. By incorporating alumni into established student activities their presence is highlighted
and they are also provided with meaningful on-campus involvement.

Young Alumni Club
Task Force recommends that the Board establish a standing Young Alumni Committee and that the
current Young Alumni Club (YAC) be represented by the standing Committee. The ongoing process
of integrating current young alumni leaders, many of whom have grown into the AANJIT’s current
board members, can be addressed by this committee.

The existing Young Alumni Club (YAC) includes individuals who have graduated within the last
twenty years. The Task Force recommends that this group be redefined to include only those
individuals who have graduated within the last ten years. We believe that this shortened time frame
may enhance the likelihood of a more cohesive group and will allow for more focused efforts of
engagement.

As an integral part of the AANJIT, the standing Young Alumni Committee will be responsible for
comprehensively advising on the successful engagement of young alumni in the life of the University.
It will focus on developing activities and content appealing to young alumni but, where feasible,
integrate these into other mainstream alumni activity. Activities should be planned as part of a
continuum. The Committee will also focus on the continued integration of young alumni and
students into the work of regional chapters and other general alumni cohorts so as to promote a natural transition to lifelong engagement.

Finally, because involving current students and young alumni is so essential to the expansion of alumni involvement – and because online engagement is such a vital and powerful environment – we recommend that the Office of Alumni Relations create a Community Officer position. This individual should have demonstrated ability to relate especially effectively to these on-line cohorts (such as Facebook). This would be an additional full-time staff position within the Office of Alumni Relations.

The Community Officer would work closely with NJIT’s University Web Services to coordinate the strategy and management of NJIT’s overall on-line presence, brand, and customer/affiliate engagement. The goal of the Community Officer would be to stimulate and manage change in the alumni culture towards one of involvement, engagement, and giving.

V. ADDITIONAL TASK FORCE SUGGESTIONS

The Task Force enthusiastically supports the following ongoing efforts:

The Office of Alumni Relations

The work of the Task Force did not include a study of the organization and deployment of The Office of Alumni Relations. This function comes under the prevue of its Director. We do recommend, however, that the Director be charged with preparing a business plan that includes staffing sufficient to incorporate the recommendations of the Report.

The goal of any office of alumni relations is to expand alumni engagement beyond the limits of its staff. To do that, it is necessary to decentralize responsibility for alumni events and to build a sense of self-reliance and ownership among alumni groups. It is smart to work towards a better balance between the role of event-planner and the more productive role of facilitator and guide. The Office of Alumni Relations should oversee broad efforts such as:

- building and managing a volunteer network,
- organizing and conducting training workshops for alumni leaders,
- designing and implementing large engagement opportunities for alumni,
- developing a larger, more vibrant national network of chapters, and
- deploying central institutional resources including the President, the faculty, and other senior University leaders.

Content

Recommendations regarding specific alumni relations content are beyond the scope of the Task Force. We believe, however, that offering a wide and diverse range of compelling programs and services will increase engagement.
Database
A comprehensive, accurate, and user-friendly database of alumni information is essential. The Office of Alumni Relations currently has good data for more than 50,000 alumni. The ongoing development of the database, including up-to-date information regarding alumni thoughts and values, must continue.

Concerns for the quality, quantity, and accessibility of alumni data were expressed. The resulting lost opportunities are expensive and pose a continuing barrier for the AANJIT. If an army marches on its stomach, it can be said that a successful advancement program marches on the quality of its data. There is still much to be done in this regard.

University priority must be given across-departments, colleges, and programs to conduct a systematic review of alumni data collection. Missed opportunities to capture student/alumni affiliation points must be identified and rectified. New protocols and procedures must be designed to capture such data from other NJIT systems. A new culture of student/alumni information must be established.

Further, those affinity points must be made portable and actionable. Alumni data must be ported and exposed (within privacy guidelines) in internal and external digital environments to facilitate the self-organization of alums into affinity groups.

New mindsets in data and relationship management, as well as new digital tools, third-party software, and protocols, are required to accomplish this.

Communication with and between Alumni
In addition to direct face-to-face interaction at committee meetings and events, the University communicates with alumni in a number of other ways:

- NJIT Magazine,
- The Edge, a University e-newsletter,
- Alumni Association of NJIT Newsletter,
- Blast-emails,
- Facebook.com,
- LinkedIn.com,
- postal invitations, and
- telephone.

To support its recommendations, the Task Force recommends additional in-depth study of the communications resources available to the Office of Alumni Relations and the Alumni Association’s cohort groups.

NJIT Magazine
While the Task Force agrees that the best communication occurs face-to-face, only one to two thousand of the University’s more than 50,000 alumni participate in alumni events in a given year. In contrast, NJIT Magazine reaches all 50,000+ alumni with good addresses. It is currently the most significant and regular form of communication they receive. While an electronic newsletter, The Edge, is e-mailed to all of approximately 15,000 alumni with email addresses, tracking data indicates that only about 4,000 recipients open the email.
The Task Force reviewed the alumni magazines of various universities and believes that a fundamental requirement for success across the broad front of alumni relations depends on regular communication with a consistent message. The message should reflect that:

- NJIT alumni are an active community that positively impacts the University’s success,
- NJIT alumni are valued and permeate the life of the University, and that
- NJIT alumni achievement in social and professional arenas is diverse and considerable.

Alumni rely on *NJIT Magazine* for news and impressions of their alma mater and fellow alumni. The Task Force recommends creation of a study group that would include in its ranks the magazine staff, the three AANJIT Board members who now serve on the editorial advisory board, and also additional alumni in the communications field. The Magazine Study Group should report by December 2010 and should do two things:

- assess the editorial content of the magazine to see how it might engage more alumni and
- consider whether the Magazine’s three times per year publication is adequate.

**Web-Based Communications**

Modern web tools (especially social networking platforms) offer new opportunities for cohorts to self-organize and engage with one another. These environments (free of geographical, financial, temporal limitations) offer lower barriers for participation than traditional face-to-face events. The goal, obviously, is to convert web-based engagements over time to deeper physical, emotional, and financial engagements with NJIT.

The new basics of alumni communications:

- The use of web-based technologies to take various conferences and committee meetings on-line and realistically broaden the geographic range of a committee’s membership.
- The use of web-based video presentations and archived meetings which make sharing information more convenient and accessible.
- The use of virtual communities such as Facebook, Linked-In, and Twitter which reach alumni at their convenience, make information available instantly, and incorporate a viral ability to encourage event attendance and promote discussion of various topics.

Embracing and leveraging the virtual community for NJIT:

A new engagement model is needed that best leverages NJIT alumni data into online and web tools (e.g., a sophisticated third-party email management and tracking system; a next generation alumni portal software that “snaps” into Facebook and LinkedIn; an NJIT Reunion application that is downloadable to the mobile devices of attendees; etc.).

Assessing the University’s current digital tools:

- Raiser’s Edge constituent relationship management (CRM) system (a.k.a. “the Database”)
- Alumni website on njit.edu
- Web for Alumni portal in Pipeline (a home-grown system)
• Email blasts
• New Facebook, Linkedin, and Flickr sites

Unfortunately, most of NJIT’s current tools are not performing in an integrated fashion and their current inability to communicate ultimately provides a lackluster experience for our alumni. The alumni relations efforts of many other universities utilize modern and connected tools that provide a much improved alumni experience and capture and re-use data for better-focused programming and interactions. In exploring the alumni websites of more than fifty competing educational institutions, the Task Force noted two particular providers were involved in the development of a majority of these sites. The consistent quality of these sites, their inviting appearance, and how exposure to these sites energized even Task Force members, suggested that these 3rd party providers have a broad experience with alumni community development issues.

NJIT needs to upgrade and replace their current tools so that the Office of Alumni Relations is better able to engage with the NJIT alumni and promote the NJIT brand and mission through these channels.

• A robust third-party email management tool (software) that can monitor and track who receives and reads our emails; how often they are being targeted; templates for NJIT-branded emails; bounce-rates; self-service “do not subscribe” options; personalized emails (e.g., “Dear Susan” and “Last year you gave $100.”)’ and more. Such a management tool should be useful to the entire NJIT enterprise beyond just the Office of Alumni Relations.
• A sophisticated and state-of-the-art third-party portal product that bridges the gap between the information in Raiser’s Edge and environments where our alumni are already making themselves known (today Facebook and Linkedin, in the future other environments). Alumni are not coming to our Web for Alumni portal; NJIT needs to go to them.
• A third-party-hosted alumni website that is a data-driven hub pulling in information from Raiser’s Edge, the email management tool, and the new portal product.

But tools alone are not enough. NJIT must not miss the opportunity to forge a deeper bond with those alums who cross the newly-lowered barriers and explore newly-exposed affinity points. A technology strategy and technology tools must be married to real people doing hands-on engagement in those venues to pull newly-engaged alums into the funnel of deeper participation and engagement with NJIT. The successful product of these efforts can extend beyond Alumni Relations into communities of support for Athletics, Development, Admissions, etc. Anything less is opportunity lost, resources wasted, and a poor return on investment.

The existing Alumni Association committee for web-based communication has too low a profile and should be formally recognized by the AANJIT Board as the standing Web-Based Communications Committee. The Committee should consider ways to optimize web presence and social media opportunities. This group should report to the Alumni Association Board by December 2010.
Culture Change
Returning to the previously mentioned theme of culture change, we also recommend that the University consider bringing in experts on culture change: how to manage it, how to encourage it, how to feed it.

There are certain techniques aimed at culture change that NJIT would benefit from further exploring, such as norm resetting, behavioral psychology, and modeling.

Lastly, NJIT periodically benchmarks itself against of peer and “competitor” schools, such as RPI, Carnegie Mellon, Lafayette, Rutgers, Stevens, etc. Perhaps we need to identify other universities whose history and evolution most resembles ours so we can see how their alumni culture has developed:

- Urban, commuter, teaching college in the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s that transitioned to Urban, residential, research university in the 80’s, 90’s, and 00’s
- Diverse student demographics; many students are first-generation to go to college
- STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) orientation
- Comparable endowment; comparable student body

The above peer list would not reflect who we want to be or associate ourselves with insomuch as a list from which case studies could be made on alumni culture.

Funding
If it is to succeed in building broader alumni engagement, the University should assess whether alumni relations is funded adequately in comparison to other NJIT units and ambitions. Given the aggressive nature of the Report’s recommendation, the Task Force recognizes the need for increased self-scrutiny regarding existing budgets, priorities, and procedures.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

This Report makes recommendations to the President of NJIT, who will consider them from the perspective of what is best for the whole University. We would also like to recommend how the President might proceed from here.

Vetting
We recommend that early in his considerations, the President circulate the Report to a representative array of University stakeholders, including alumni leaders, for the purpose of eliciting additional input that will almost certainly inform these findings. We further suggest that this input be requested by a designated date. At the outset of such vetting, we advise that the President withhold any particular bias so as to elicit the fullest possible benefit from the vetting process.

Implementing
Once the vetting process is completed, the President should move forward with the recommendations he supports quickly and with conviction so as to emphasize the University’s commitment to a new era of alumni relations.
Specifically, he should designate a small team selected from the Task Force, numbering no more than seven, and including the Director of Alumni Relations, and empower the team to guide the implementation process. The Implementation Team might also include one or two alumni with fresh perspective who were not members of the Task Force.

During the next two academic years, the entire Task Force should be reconvened at six-month intervals to hear progress reports from the Implementation Team and discuss any open issues. The Task Force should disband no later than August 2011.

**Timetable**
The first order of business for the Implementation Team should be to announce a timetable for its work. We recommend that all the accepted recommendations be put into play within a period of three to five years. We see no virtue to be gained from an extended transition period.

The Task Force also recommends that the AANJIT embrace the *Report* and begin implementation as quickly as possible without waiting for the Implementation Team. We emphasize that the greatest chance for success rests with the AANJIT’s ability to transform itself quickly.

**Informing the Alumni Body of Changes**
The Task Force recommendations and progress to date should be announced to alumni in general with follow-up reports as warranted. We recommend also that the President mark the occasion with a major address or paper announcing a new era of alumni relations.

**Charter Documents**
At an appropriate time, but sooner rather than later, the current *Alumni Association Charter Documents* should be revised to reflect accepted recommendations.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

NJIT’s history of alumni relations has been replete with lost opportunity for both the University and its alumni. We believe that today’s corps of talented and dedicated University and alumni leaders is a force for change. This new dynamic can move NJIT into the vanguard of peer institutions with the finest alumni relations program there is. That is our ambition. In the face of such a commitment, and in response to this imperative for change, we urge the University to move forward promptly in its consideration of these recommendations which will result, at last, in the realization of the great potential of our alumni body.
VIII. APPENDIX-1 (METHODOLOGY)

The Task Force on Alumni Relations was convened in September 2009. It was composed of University and alumni representatives, including senior leadership of the Alumni Association of NJIT (AANJIT). The Task Force met four times over a period of three months to produce this Report of the Task Force on Alumni Relations. Meetings were facilitated by Dan White, of eAdvancement.

The Task Force discussed a variety of topics including the reciprocal relationship between alumni and the University, how associations at other universities work, and what the defining principles and framework for the AANJIT should be. Task Force members listed preliminary areas of focus and then organized these into broad categories;

- Vision and mission
- Structure and organization
- Programs and activities
- Implementation
- Funding

Each broad category was discussed in detail and findings and recommendations were made. Finally, a writing group subcommittee was convened to discuss and edit a draft Report written by Dan White. This Report of the Task Force on Alumni Relations is the result of that effort.

IX. APPENDIX-2 (PRECEPTS)

Some Important Precepts for Alumni Relations at NJIT:

- This Task Force defines alumni relations as the process of connecting or reconnecting alumni to the University in ways that lead to multi-faceted support of the University’s mission and goals.

- An alumnus/a is currently defined as a graduate or former student who has completed at least one semester of study at NJIT. Upon graduation, students automatically obtain alumni status, associated with the class in which they matriculated.

- All alumni are considered to be members of the Alumni Association of NJIT (AANJIT).

- The AANJIT is the official alumni association of NJIT and serves the University by pursuing activities and services designed to engage broad-based alumni participation in support of the University.

- Alumni relations begin with matriculation and continue over the lifetime of an individual. Every member of the campus community has a role to play in alumni relations.

- If well done, alumni relations will be reflected in every indicator of institutional success including enrollment, financial resources, faculty qualifications, and academic reputation.

- Finally, alumni relations is one of the principle forces of institutional advancement.
X. APPENDIX-3 (GENERAL PRINCIPLES)

Some General Principles of Effective Alumni Relations:

To develop a better context for its work, the Task Force allocated time to research a selection of other institutions to gain understanding of other alumni relations programs. Some of the best practices that emerged among the peer institutions are listed here.

1. An unwavering commitment by alumni leaders and the alumni association to the growth and development of the University.

2. A keen understanding by the University administration that alumni are a core human asset of the University, along with Faculty, Students, and Staff.

3. An alumni body emotionally involved with the institution.

4. An alumni relations program integrated with advancement and guided by a shared mission that focuses every step.

5. An alumni association built on a leadership pyramid; in which alumni leaders move up through positions of increasing authority and responsibility.

6. An alumni association in which volunteer and staff leaders put the interests of the University above their personal or association interests.

7. A partnership between staff and alumni that is constantly attended to, refreshed and renewed, and in which:
   - every decision is guided by its potential impact on the mission of the institution.
   - the strength and discipline of the volunteer pyramid is maintained.
   - there is a steady turnover of alumni leaders so that new views are constantly brought to the decision-making process.

8. An alumni office that takes responsibility for managing the larger institutional partnerships that include faculty, staff, and students.

XI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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