Title:
Developing Future Leaders: Promoting Alumni Engagement to Connect the Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract Summary:
The authors examined factors associated with membership and engagement in an alumni association. The pilot study aimed to increase program loyalty and develop future leaders by engaging students in alumni activities 6-12 months prior to graduation. Alumni members would report an increase in value through participation in student teaching/learning activities.

Learning Activity:

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<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE</th>
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<td>The learner will be able to identify strategies to involve past alumni and present students in program activities to increase collaboration and promote shared experiences.</td>
<td>Background research, pilot study discussion</td>
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<td>The learner will be able to utilize leadership practices to promote alumni association engagement and support</td>
<td>Data analysis, strategy review, &quot;what works well&quot;</td>
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Abstract Text:
Alumni Associations are comprised of former graduates or participants of an organization, program, department, or university. Due to the current economic climate in today's higher education system, alumni giving is often essential for special university projects and strategic community events. In addition to maintaining a connection between alumni and the organization, alumni associations also keep alumni connected to one another.

Within nursing, alumni associations may support current students through scholarship support and provide mentoring opportunities. New graduates and experienced nurses are able to share stories and support one another through tears of empathy and smiles of encouragement. Alumni donations may take the form of financial support, the gift of resources, and the gift of time. Alumni Associations also have the power to serve as one voice to join with others to advocate for the nursing profession.

The authors examined factors associated with membership and engagement in a dues-based alumni association. The pilot study aimed to increase program loyalty and develop future leaders by engaging students in alumni activities six to twelve months prior to graduation. Alumni members would also report an increase in value through participation in student teaching/learning activities.

The research was conducted at a pre-licensure school of nursing in the Southwestern part of the United States. Founded in 1918, the nursing school has over 5,000 nursing graduates, yet the alumni association was small in number and focused primarily on raising funds for student support through scholarships. The average age of the Alumni Board is 60.5 and the average age of all members is 53.2. Over the last 20 years, alumni association communications and activities have continued to decline, with no meetings in 2015, and one annual meeting, attended by 25 alumni in 2016.

Intentional efforts based on James Louzes and Barry Posner’s Leadership Practices were used guide the Alumni Association Board to find new meaning and direction for the association. Efforts and activities were based on the five K & P leadership practices: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

Strategic and deliberate efforts to measure and explore the current state of the alumni association began with changes at the Board level. A new, and more holistic mission statement replaced the three financially-focused “purpose statements” in the bylaws. A series of Board member meetings, with structured objectives, led to the alumni engagement survey conducted in early 2017. Statistical analyses found support and interest in membership as well as leadership positions. Strategies were initiated to increase the Alumni Association membership as well as introduce current students to the Alumni Association on multiple occasions throughout the student experience.

Alumni Associations foster much more than traditions and rituals. Members share common stories and experiences making it easier to demonstrate empathy and support. Instilling a sense of community by providing opportunities for alumni to connect with the nursing program supports both personal and professional growth. Retention in the nursing profession can be promoted by fostering relationships that cross generational boundaries. Affective alumni associations have demonstrated increased financial support, increased alumni involvement, and alumni association growth.