



Evaluation of Alumni Contact in Forensic Science Programs

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ABSTRACT

Because alumni have traveled the same path that current students are walking [1], they are a resource to assist current students and faculty. However, it is only useful if communication between alumni and the academic program exists. Currently forensic science programs try to remain in communication with alumni through surveys, social media, newsletters, personal communications, alumni receptions, and email.

Continued alumni contact is problematic, and finding out why they do not maintain contact can be tricky. Those most likely to return an emailed survey are already in contact with the program. For those who would likely not return a survey, alternative methods of contact need to be identified. Current methods of communication need to be evaluated for effectiveness. Literature on alumni relations offers insight into the general principles involved in maintaining a high level of contact with graduates. Ultimately the transformation of alumni into stakeholders is a worthy goal.

INTRODUCTION

Marshall University's Forensic Science Program (MUFSP) maintains contact with its alumni, but the process could be improved. The current methods of communication are similar to methods employed by other forensic science programs at different universities, but a low percentage of alumni are responding.

Current methods of communication are:

- Maintain a database of alumni contact information
- Email job opportunities to students and alumni from alumni
- Email graduate satisfaction and employer satisfaction surveys
- Maintain announcements on the program's website and social media
- Personal communication between faculty, staff, and alumni

The key evaluand questions to be answered are:

- What would increase alumni participation in the communication process?
- How do we transform the alumni into stakeholders in the communication process?

METHODS & MATERIALS

The current methods of communicating with alumni were evaluated to determine their level of effectiveness. Effective methods were evaluated to determine if they can be improved upon.

To increase alumni participation in the communication process, other methods of connecting with the alumni were identified by contacting other forensic science programs at different universities to find out how they are maintaining contact with their alumni.

A review of the literature regarding alumni relations provided information as to what interaction with students and alumni would encourage alumni to remain in contact.

RESULTS

An evaluation of met/unmet and conscious/unconscious needs for the MUFSP identified what communication methods were successful and could be improved upon as well as identified methods that were successful but not being utilized [2].

Table 1. Met/Unmet needs of which the MUFSP may/may not be aware

	Met Needs	Unmet Needs
Unconscious	Successful communication that could be improved: social media, surveys	Successful communication methods that are not being utilized: newsletter
Conscious	Successful communication methods that meet expectations: invitations to events	Successful communication methods identified but not implemented: continuing education courses

New ideas for increasing alumni communication were identified by contacting forensic science programs at other universities to identify ways they are successful at maintaining contact with their alumni [3-7].

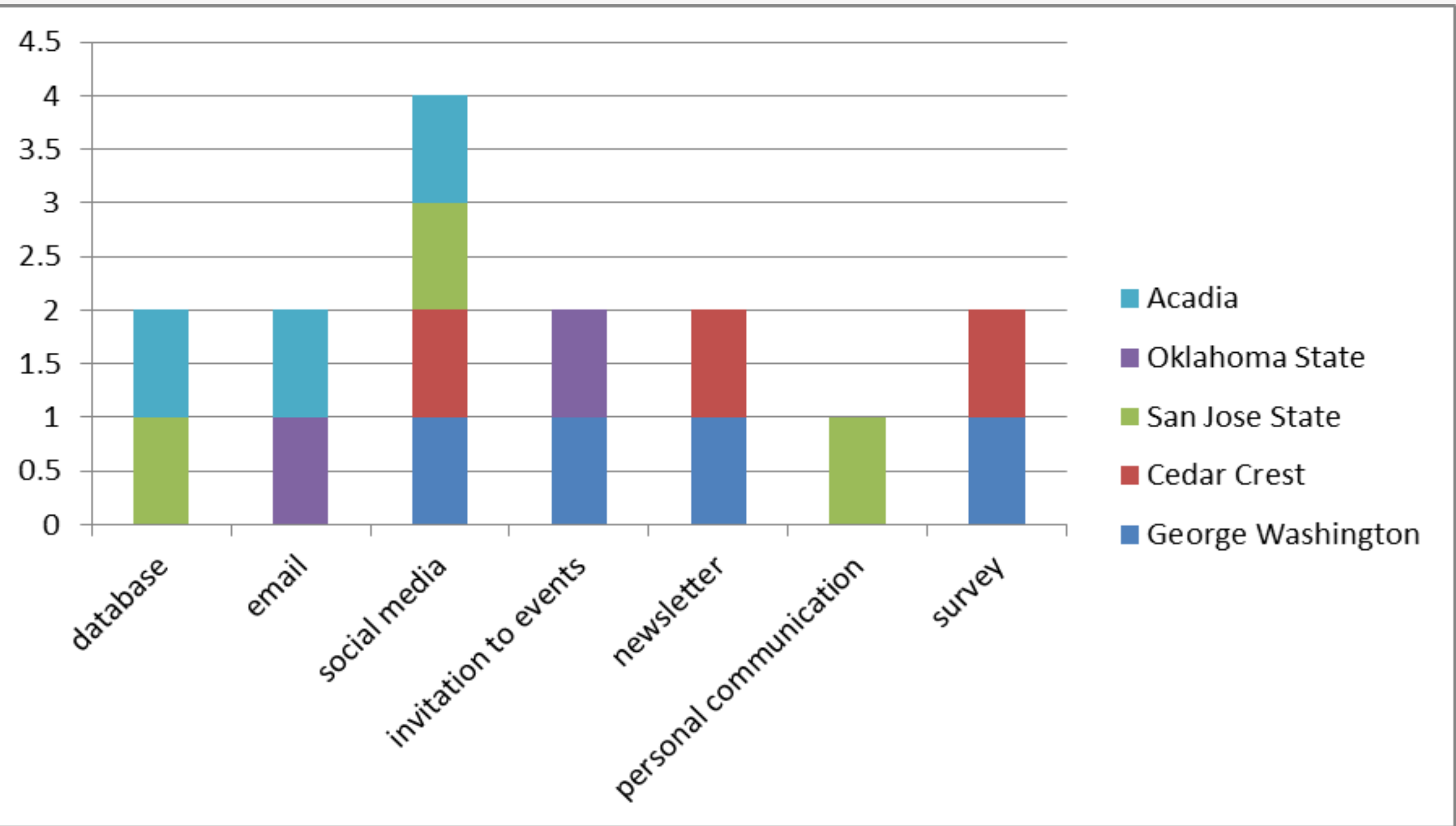


Figure 1. Types of successful alumni communication used at forensic science programs

Based on process, implementation, and outcome evaluations of the MUFSP's communication with alumni and a review of alumni relations literature, criteria and sources of evidence were identified for evaluation of future improvements to alumni communication [2].

Table 2: Criteria to evaluate success of alumni communication

Category	Criteria	Sources of Evidence
Content Evaluation	Maintain security of contact information including limiting who has access to contact information	Use a secure computer database only accessible to a few key staff
		Electronically published newsletter
	Define what is considered continued communication with alumni and what constitutes a reasonable amount	Written definitions
	Define what types of continuing education will be offered	Written list of workshops offered
	Align continuing education offerings with current laboratory accreditation standards and practices	Table created as part of the accreditation process
Implementation Evaluation	Continuing education curricula are in accordance with laboratory accreditation standards	Accreditation of program by FEPAC
	Continuing education curricula are in accordance with current laboratory practices	Accreditation of laboratory by ASCLD-LAB, FQS, etc.
Outcome Evaluation	Alumni value contact with the program	Alumni keep contact information up to date
	Alumni increase contact with the program	Alumni return completed surveys
		Alumni encourage employers to return completed surveys

Weerts and Ronca also found that the more engaged a student was in the teaching and learning at an institution, the more likely they are to remain in contact after graduation [8]. Newman and Petrosko found that alumni tended to be more loyal to the institution they received their undergraduate degree rather than their graduate degree [9]. Rissmeyer also identified that alumnus loyalty begins while the graduate is at the institution [1]. Events

and programs that bring the students in contact with faculty and staff outside of the classroom build better relationships [10]. Edgar and Hyde demonstrated that continued communication with alumni employed in the field can help guide curriculum [10]. Their advice ensures the curriculum continually teaches students the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to be ready to work in their field [10].

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the needs analysis, MUFSP is utilizing some successful means of communicating with alumni (Table 1). Some of these methods are meeting the needs of the program, but there are some other methods that could be utilized. Identifying successful communication methods utilized by other forensic science programs offers different options for meeting the needs of MUFSP (Figure 1). The success of these processes still need more in-depth evaluation to determine how to utilize them. Table 2 outlines criteria by which the success of each improvement can be judged.

The literature review suggested that the foundation for communication with alumni begins before graduation [9]. The program needs to make intentional efforts to foster the relationship between the student and the program, faculty, staff, and alumni. Table 1 suggests what needs are being met.

Improvements identified in the literature include:

- inviting alumni to program activities with students [8]
- inviting alumni to advisory positions with student organizations [1]
- creating an electronic newsletter [9]

FUTURE STUDIES

Prior to implementing an online newsletter, security risks would need to be identified.

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