

WSU

Western State University

College of Engineering & Architecture (CEA)

Development & Public Relations Departments

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Research Description:

The College of Engineering and Architecture would like increase donations, cultivate young, recent graduates and discover better communication tools for connecting with alumni members. The CEA website along with printed publications have been the primary way alumni association has reached out to members. The goal of this research is to articulate creative ways in which to inspire alumni giving, participation and engagement.

Alumni choose to give to their school because of the relationship formed while they were attending. This emotional connection needs to be supported in order for it to advance. Once students have left the school and become alumni; there has to be a reason to continue this connection, one that will inspire them to not only donate funds but to continue to see their alma mater as a source for life long learning.

The alumni association must add value to the personal and professional lives of its graduates. Developing a strong connection to alumni is fundamental to increasing donations. Expanding the college website and building an educational portal within it is central to cultivating this relationship.

Technology is changing the way people interact and communicate everyday. Personal appeal and emotionally charged content resonate with audiences. Creating an engaging online presence increases website interactivity while promoting retention and relationship building.

The current CEA website has a text heavy display, lack of visual content and listing of connected links which do not inspire repeated visits. Website analytics state that time spent on these pages are relatively low. The online experience has a measurable impact on retention and donor loyalty, so creating a better user experience will increase web traffic. Increasing web traffic will increase alumni donations.

Therefore, the objective of this research project is to solicit ideas, information and input from alumni members while testing outcomes to determine the direction for website development. In an effort to explore content areas and test new fundraising appeals; focus groups, a mail-in survey and an experiment will be performed. The College of Engineering and Architecture (CEA) would also like information on types of communication tools graduates are using to gauge whether migrating alumni communication to a comprehensive digital platform is feasible. The CEA and its development departments need to know how to strengthen rapport with recent graduates, as this group has the most potential for long term growth. Out of the 20,000 alumni association members, only 20% (4,000 members) are actively donating. The CEA development staff would like to increase that percentage by 15-20%. In order to achieve this fundraising goal, we need to cater our communication towards the other 16,000 members.

Strategic areas:

- Determine content areas that will resonate with alumni
- Test online vs. print donation appeals in conjunction with the new donation software on the CEA website
- Explore the possibility of using cost effective e-zines to replace hard-copy publications
- Test the potential effectiveness of different fundraising appeals
- Understand how to strengthen relationships with recent graduates producing gains in donations in the short and long term

Focus Group Design & Procedure:

Summary:

The purpose of this focus group is to understand the attitudes and behaviors of the College of Engineering and Architecture alumni. The CEA would like to learn how to communicate more effectively with its alumni and gain an understanding of the perceptions they may have about donating to the college. One of the goals of this focus group is to generate ideas for a more engaging website. Focus group members will be shown a clutter reel of student testimonials, videos, graphics, several 'give here' buttons, student profiles, different layout (less links), blogs, charts of where money is spent, a *Did You Know* fundraising appeal and will rate them as they are shown. Also included will be an introduction of a new online donation application. This informal research process will ask for feedback on content and style for updated website content including an enhanced social media feature that links alumni, students and faculty. Learning alumni perceptions about new marketing content will aid in developing and testing an enhanced website in the experiment phase of this research.

After the clutter reel, the moderator will pose questions to the focus group which will be recorded and analyzed later. The aim with these questions is to add depth to the clutter reel analysis while determining how best to communicate with alumni through technology. Through this group we hope to gain knowledge about the behaviors and attitudes of alumni giving. Discovering ideas that would inspire a recent graduate to give to their alma mater while learning some of the hidden hindrances to avoid.

Alumni records indicate that a high percentage of the CEA graduates live and work in urban areas of Washington state. To assist with the recruitment and logistics of this focus group, Northwest Insights in Seattle has been selected to pre-screen participants and subsequently facilitate the focus group. An evening session will be scheduled with two separate focus groups held in Seattle. Participants will be chosen from the CEA alumni roster and vetted through the research facility. A pre-screening questionnaire will be given to Northwest Insights and to the CEA to secure participants. Once participants are chosen, they will be contacted and asked to participate in this study.

After the session, we will analyze transcripts for emergent themes and synthesize useful data. Any emerging themes and useful data will help steer future campaigns.

Logistics:

Research Facility:

Northwest Insights 2101 4th Ave, Seattle

- validated parking is available
- It is recommended that the team meets prior to the scheduled focus group at the facility and with moderator to make sure they understand the research and check that all equipment is in working order

Two focus groups:

1st Focus Group: **6-7:30pm**

2nd Focus Group: **8-9:30pm**

Pre-screening criteria & Target audience:

Female: 40% Male: 60%

Age: 30-55 year olds

Alumni of the College of Engineering and Architecture

Additional Instructions:

- Clutter reel will be provided (15 min. of images, videos, student testimonials, faculty profiles and related alumni content to be tested).
- Each focus group should take between 80-90 minutes and will include 8-12 participants.
- Participants should be encouraged to speak freely and ask for clarification if needed.
- The moderator will facilitate the discussion and present media to the groups. His/her responsibility will be to work through questions and script to glean information about participant's attitudes and behaviors towards alumni giving.
- As the focus group unfolds the moderator should use his/her best judgment to determine if the focus group is providing valuable information for the team.
- Provide paper and pen to participants to take notes during the focus group. Collect these notes at the end of the discussion as they may yield insight not spoken by the participant.
- Organized time: Moderator welcome 5-10 minutes, perception analyzer segment 20 minutes, general questions 40 minutes, follow up questions 10 minutes. Close and thank you 5 minutes.

Some considerations with focus groups:

Focus groups, while a great way to understand perceptions and attitudes, lack external validity. There is no representative sample because each group is so small and the sample is not probability based. Since focus groups generally employ logical inference (logically these results represent a population), they are highly subjective and answers can be biased. There is no way to statistically analyze results. Additionally, care needs to be taken while interpreting data as it is very easy to skew results in favor of a particular point of view. Focus groups are less expensive than other methods, can be flexible and are often done very quickly. If after the first focus group of the evening the CEA team would like to add or delete questions for further clarification on themes, this can be achieved through this method.

For Moderator: The goal of this focus group is to comprehend the perception of alumni giving, understand transparency issues and determine what communication tools this demographic prefers and employs for connection. Please adhere to normally set protocols for language, leading and active listening.

Total time for this group should be 80-90 minutes, divided as such:

Part I- Welcome- 5 minutes

Part II- Perception Analyzer with clutter reel- 20 minutes

Part III-General Questions- 40 minutes

Part IV- Follow up questions- 10 minutes

Part V-Close and Thank you- 5 minutes

Moderator's Guide & Script:

Thank you for participation in this research study. As alumni of Western State University you are in a unique position and have been chosen for your insight and perception. Your feedback today will impact the future direction of alumni communication. My name is Charles Shaw and I will be with you during our conversation this evening. As moderator, my main goal is to facilitate open dialogue, present our discussion topics and ask for further elaboration as needed.

Our discussion today should take about ninety minutes. You will notice that in front of you is a Perception Analyzer. This piece of equipment will be used to rate images, videos and website content and is part of our data collection. After the 'clutter reel' I will ask you a series of questions aimed at understanding how you use of technology, your attitudes towards giving and perceptions of organizational transparency. If time allows, we will review your perception analyzer ratings and engage in dialogue to elaborate on those responses.

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to answer every question. With that in mind, time should go by very fast and we do want your voice to be heard. This session will be recorded, so that no information is missed. This session is confidential and no one other than those present will know what has been said. Your comments will be transcribed from the audio recording and used for marketing and research purposes only. Please make sure to speak clearly and please do not talk while

others are talking. We want to make sure that everyone is heard and respected. Do you have any questions before we get started?

We have a lot of topics to cover tonight but let's start off with something fun.

Ice breaker question- What three words or phrases would you use to describe the best event you ever attended?

Focus Group General Questions:

1. Was your education at WSU an important aspect of your personal development?
2. Did you have a favorite professor while in school?
3. Would you be interested in knowing what that professor was doing now?
4. Was your education at WSU an important part of your professional development?
5. What is your preferred method for being contacted?
6. How should an alumni association stay connected to the industry?
7. Is transparency important when donating?
8. Student testimonials: are they appealing on a website?
9. Is donor recognition important to you?
10. How important are students' reports about the use of their scholarship?
11. What do you see as the impact of donating to your alma mater?
12. How interested are you in reading faculty profiles in alumni communication?
13. How interested are you in reading profiles of successful graduates in alumni communication?
14. Do you prefer digital or print communication from your alumni association?

15. Would knowing student research inspire you to donate?
16. What are key issues you are interested in? (energy systems, materials, aerospace, power grid protection, global research, diversity)
17. Would you be interested in mentoring a student?
18. Would you be interested in attending alumni events with faculty, other professionals or students?
19. What do you know about WSU's Innovator Series?
20. Do you use LinkedIn for alumni connections?
21. Does making gifts to on campus 'clubs' inspire you to give?
22. Are donor recognition events important to you?
23. Would connecting alumni with students that are doing similar research and need funding inspire you to donate?
24. Have you ever used MyStory to connect with fellow alumni?
25. Would alumni tours be of interest to you?
26. How often do you visit the CEA website?
27. What do you do while on the website?
28. What are some of your favorite websites?
29. Why do you like them?
30. What makes a website engaging?
31. What type of social media do you use?
32. Do you prefer receiving electronic or printed media?
33. Is it important that your employer participates in a donor matching program?
34. How often do you read the CEA newsletter?
35. How often do you read Washington State Magazine/E magazine?

36. WSM is published quarterly, would you prefer that it arrives digitally?
37. Would you be an ambassador for the CEA? Why or why not?
38. How would you transform your relationship with your school?
39. Would you be interested in an app that provided an easy way to donate to the college?
40. What technology do you use the most? Why?

Survey:

Summary:

Formative research will gather information to effectively answer questions about ways to increase alumni contribution to Western State University (WSU). In particular, the College of Engineering and Architecture (CEA) needs to understand how to connect with alumni and potential donors, find out what motivates them to give and determine if the CEA can move from printed materials to primarily digital communication. This descriptive survey is created to glean knowledge about the behaviors, attitudes and tools of this demographic.

The CEA has an alumni pool of 20,000 members, out of this pool, we will choose a random sample to send survey notification letters and questionnaires. With 20,000 alumni in the representative group with a 3% +/- margin of error and a confidence level of 95%, we will need to send survey notifications and letters to 5070 alumni members. If the response rate is 20%, the required sample size needed would have to be at least 1014 people. This probability based sample is likely to be representative of the alumni

population, so results will have high external validity. We have to consider that projecting results will only be generalizable to members of the list though.

The entire alumni list will be utilized for this survey because we want feedback from people who have donated and from people who have yet to donate. Some alumni in this sample, while having donated in the past, may not be giving to 'capacity'.

Capacity is their financial ability to donate match with their commitment to the college.

Their combined responses will add depth to this study.

Pretest Results:

The first phase of this research method was pre-testing the survey notification letter and questionnaire on a sample of five individuals. The goal was to gain feedback about question wording, timing and determine if any further clarification on survey structure was needed. Most respondents claimed the survey took 15-20 minutes to complete and gave some feedback on the transparency and technology questions. For example, one of the male respondents answered "I don't know" to the question of about how the alumni utilizes money for research purposes. It wasn't one of the selections so I realized that I should review my categories to allow answer beyond, undecided. There was also some awkward wording that was revised for the final survey along with altering the survey method to a prominently interval level of measurement. Revision was needed to gain better insight into the demographic makeup of alumni participants.

Pre-Notification Letter (on letterhead):

Western State University
College of Engineering and Architecture
4356 Smarty Road, Pullman WA

December 11, 2015

Greetings CEA Alumni member,

You have been randomly selected to participate in a short mail survey. The College of Engineering and Architecture is reviewing its website and other communication tools and need your contribution. This survey will ask you questions about your student experience, issues surrounding alumni donation transparency and the use of digital communication for connection and relationship building.

Your feedback is confidential and voluntary. For participating in this research, once you return this survey, we will send you a special edition alumni license plate holder and \$25 gift card to the WSU bookstore. Further information will be arriving soon.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to your remarks.

Thank you,

College of Engineering and Architecture

Western State University

Cover letter (on letterhead):

Western State University
College of Engineering and Architecture
4356 Smarty Road, Pullman WA

December 11, 2015

Greetings CEA Alumni,

As alumni of Western State University you are in a unique position to evaluate the communication strategies of the College of Engineering and Architecture. You have been chosen for your insight and guidance as we develop tools that better reflect your interests and cultivate more effective ways to communicate with alumni.

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about your student experience, issues surrounding alumni donation transparency and the use of digital communication for connection and relationship building. You have received this letter randomly since you are alumni of the CEA and your information will be used for research purposes only.

Your selections will be reviewed by the College of Engineering and Architecture's public relations staff and development departments and will not be used for any other purpose than for its stated intention. Your feedback will influence the future direction of alumni communication.

This short survey should take between 10-15 minutes. Enclosed you will find a self-addressed, stamped envelope to use when returning the survey. Please return this survey by **January 5, 2016**. Please feel free to include any additional comments. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Alena Feeney at 866.423-7894. Your response and time is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

College of Engineering and Architecture

Western State University

Survey Questions:

Please select an answer for each of the following statements:	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't know
How satisfied are you with being kept informed of the use of WSU donor funds?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the information you receive regarding the use of donation funds?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with your ability to donate to your chosen department?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the level of student research?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the donation request method?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied do you feel about your connection to WSU?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the benefits of being a donor?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you receiving printed materials from the CEA via mail delivery?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the level of faculty research?	<input type="radio"/>				
How satisfied are you with the current CEA website?	<input type="radio"/>				

Please select an answer for each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I use mobile technology (smart phone, tablet, laptop wearable tech) more often than stationary technology (desk top computer).	<input type="radio"/>				
My donations are an investment in the future.	<input type="radio"/>				
Social Media outlets such as Facebook or Twitter are useful when searching for information about a company, product or organization.	<input type="radio"/>				
Student testimonials about how the scholarship impacts their work is important.	<input type="radio"/>				
Participating in a Greek Life fraternity/sorority was a valuable experience.	<input type="radio"/>				
I prefer to receive electronic updates from the CEA (text, email, social media).	<input type="radio"/>				
School sports programs are an important part of the alumni association.	<input type="radio"/>				
Online forums keep me aware of school news.	<input type="radio"/>				
Philanthropic giving is commendable.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please select an answer for each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I use online tools such as the Internet to search for information more often than I use print materials.	<input type="radio"/>				
Donor recognition is important to me	<input type="radio"/>				
I like to learn about current research and research projects from the CEA.	<input type="radio"/>				
My WSU education has prepared me for my profession.	<input type="radio"/>				
The website is a useful tool when I want to find out information about the College of Engineering and Architecture (CEA).	<input type="radio"/>				
Tax deductible donations influence my decision to give	<input type="radio"/>				
Faculty profiles and updates on the CEA website is interesting to me	<input type="radio"/>				
My donation dollars support critical research in aerospace, clean energy and materials development	<input type="radio"/>				
Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn can keep me connected to CEA alumni and faculty	<input type="radio"/>				
Digital communication from the college is preferred to printed communication	<input type="radio"/>				
The CEA quarterly publications showcase relevant topics	<input type="radio"/>				

Please select an answer for each of the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
I wish the CEA website featured more content about potential employers and industry-related news.	<input type="radio"/>				
Mentorships and student research inspire me to donate to their major.	<input type="radio"/>				
I would be interested in reading stories or profiles about current students and alumni on the CEA website.	<input type="radio"/>				
Lifelong learning is important to me?	<input type="radio"/>				
I regularly (at least once per week) visit the CEA website to keep up-to-date in current news from the college.	<input type="radio"/>				
Incentives such as; alumni gear, recognition and donor appreciation events motivate me to donate.	<input type="radio"/>				
Knowing exactly what my donation will help fund would encourage me to donate.	<input type="radio"/>				
Multimedia content is more engaging and makes me want to visit site more often.	<input type="radio"/>				
Opportunities to share knowledge publicly is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>				
Professional relationships built through the alumni association are important.	<input type="radio"/>				

This next section asks questions about you. This information is necessary to understand the demographic makeup of our alumni association.

The data you share with us will not be used to personally identify you, and will not be passed on to anyone else. If you prefer not to answer these questions, please use the 'other' option.

Demographic Information:					
Please select your age group.	20-30 <input type="radio"/>	31-41 <input type="radio"/>	42-52 <input type="radio"/>	53-63 <input type="radio"/>	63-73+ <input type="radio"/>
What is your highest level of education completed?	Bachelor's <input type="radio"/>	Master's <input type="radio"/>	Post Graduate <input type="radio"/>	Doctorate <input type="radio"/>	
Please specific your ethnicity. (you may choose more than one option)	African American <input type="radio"/>	Caucasian <input type="radio"/>	Hispanic <input type="radio"/>	Asian <input type="radio"/>	Other <input type="radio"/>
What is your gender?	Female <input type="radio"/>	Male <input type="radio"/>	Undefined <input type="radio"/>		
What is your annual household income?	25-40,999k <input type="radio"/>	41-55,999k <input type="radio"/>	56-75,999k <input type="radio"/>	76-99,999k <input type="radio"/>	100k+ <input type="radio"/>
What was your major in the College of Engineering and Architecture?	Computer Science <input type="radio"/>	Architectural Science <input type="radio"/>	Mechanical Engineering <input type="radio"/>	Materials Science <input type="radio"/>	Other <input type="radio"/>
What is your employment status?	Contract <input type="radio"/>	Full-time <input type="radio"/>	Self-Employed <input type="radio"/>	Retired <input type="radio"/>	Other <input type="radio"/>
If you were interested in attending an alumni event, what geographic area would be most convenient?	Eastern WA <input type="radio"/>	Western WA <input type="radio"/>	Regional <input type="radio"/>	National <input type="radio"/>	International <input type="radio"/>

Experiment:

Summary:

The purpose of this experiment is to test whether updating the current CEA website with interactive features including enhanced audio and video content along with the addition of an online connection portal, CougarConneX, encourages current alumni to visit the website more often and embolden their philanthropic nature. Alumni members will separate into two groups of 40 participants. Each group participant will be given an iPad and directed to the CEA website, which will track user analytics. One group (control group) visit the current website and the other group (treatment group) will be shown the updated website with enhanced features. After engagement with these websites, each group will be asked a series of questions to assess whether exposure to those sites altered their position and perception of the College of Engineering and Architecture. We will measure if the enhanced website was positively received, if so, does that increase alumni intention to donate? Additionally, if alumni spend more time engaging with this new content, does that change their opinion of the college? By altering the communication tools that alumni use to connect with the college, will we see a change that strengthens alumni connection to the school?

For this experiment, we will recruit alumni that have never donated before to the school. The CEA alumni association has a list of around 16,000 members in this group. We will randomly choose names from this group for participation in this study.

Once participants are selected, they will be randomly assigned to either the control group or the treatment group. Initially as part of this experiment, we will conduct a pilot study to develop and pretest variables (which determine cause and effect) and make sure IV manipulation is sound. This will also pre-test our hypothesis and allows time to revise procedures, if needed.

Hypothesis:

Restructured and engaging website content and the additional CougarConneX platform will motivate alumni to visit the website more often and create a favorable impression of the college.

Alumni exposed to CougarConneX on the CEA enhanced website will also express a favorable attitude toward alumni participation (which will increase direct donations), then Alumni exposed to the CEA website without CougarConneX.

CougarConneX:

Online platform just for alumni that provides online learning, connects faculty research with professionals in the field and encourages connection and relationship building. Forums, fundraising, videos created by and for alumni, Greek Life, alumni events and social media portals involve alumni with the college and increases website visitation.

Alumni would register for CougarConneX, so development and public relations departments would have updated contact information. They could test fundraising appeals through a forum and gain real time insights into alumni perceptions, attitudes

and behaviors. CougarConneX would be connected to WSU helpdesk and other needed departments to support the technology and user learning curve.

Experiment design: Post –test only with control

Study Design: Between group design

Post Test DV: chose this design to avoid sensitization (so not to impact participants' answers)

Independent Variable (IV) is an updated website and the addition of the CougarConneX platform to the website.

The Dependent Variable (DV) is whether the updated content on the website and the addition of the new platform increased participant's engagement and leads to a favorable impression of the CEA.

Two groups- one control group and one treatment group:

Diagram T: R X 01

C: R 02

T=treatment

R= random assignment

01, 02 post test measurements

X= treatment (exposure to IV)

Operationalization Plan:

2 groups of alumni that have yet to donate to school (estimated 16,000)

Testing theory:

The addition of the CougarConneX portal increases website visitation, alters perception of alumni connections and leads to a broader fundraising appeal.

Treatment group: exposed to CougarConneX and revised website

Control Group: not exposed to CougarConneX, shown old website

Control group answers serve as a comparison: post-test questions to both groups, if answers change after treatment then experiment was effective because the only variable that changed between the groups was the IV.

Exit Interview: The post test for this experiment can be conducted simply. After participants have viewed website, give them these questions to answer.

Post test questions: Please fill out each question to the best of your ability.

1. What are your thoughts about the CEA website?
2. Was the content engaging?
3. What is your perception of the CEA since viewing this website?
4. Would you visit this website again? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel that this website represents you?
6. Do you have any suggestions on ways to improve the website?
7. What in your opinion was the more interesting aspect of the website?
8. Does this website provide useful information?
9. How would you connect to fellow alumni members with this website?
10. After reviewing the website, are you interested in donating to the college? Why or Why not?

Some points to consider:

Generally, experiments conducted in a lab setting are going to be **higher in internal validity and lower in external validity**. Lab experiments reduce error and help to eliminate and control bias while determining causation. While controlling variables yields accurate results, it also decreases the ability to generalize findings to the greater population. Through this experiment process we will be able to determine cause and effect as lab experiments also decrease error variance through its controlled environment.

This experiment will help researchers (us) make determinations regarding the IV/DV relationship and will be more easily replicable, if we choose to run a similar experiment with another group.

Limitations: Lab settings create an artificial research environment, which may limit external validity. There is also a chance of subject reactivity (awareness) because participants know they are being studied. This can impact participant's attitudes and behaviors when tested. Also independent variable manipulations can be weak. This is one of the primary reasons to pre-test variables before the experiment takes place.