

## Western Engaged (WE)

### Western Washington University Alumni and Friends Engagement-Towards-Investment Program

December 5, 2017

Why does engagement matter? Through engagements, alumni and friends see value. When people see value in an organization, they are more inclined to act when called upon to do so. In the case of universities, alumni who see value in their alma mater (and/or in their association with it) are more likely to attend an event, volunteer, join as a member or make a gift and do so more often. They see and care about the possibilities for the future of the university and believe they can have a positive impact.

The Western Engaged (WE) program helps the entire campus think about building meaningful connections by engaging and appreciating alumni and friends towards an ultimate goal of philanthropy and advocacy. The more engaged individuals are, the more invested they become. The outcome is strategic engagement opportunities for people who can help Western Washington University.

To be successful at Western, we can learn from best practices at universities across the country. The proven formula is:

- 1. *Gather information in one place.***
  - We will use robust technology to capture information in a common database.
- 2. *Analyze the full range of engagements.***
  - For example: speaking in a classroom, mentoring a student, serving on a board, starting an internship, creating a scholarship endowment, attending an event where people are appreciated for the engagement.
- 3. *Use predictive modeling* to determine what invitation to extend next for increased engagement.**
  - For example, Amazon will send you “suggestions” for 5 books you might like to read, based on your recent purchase. Western can segment invitations based on past attendance, or, when engagements start multiplying, we can personalize an invitation to help with a specific project, giving people more specific and tailored opportunities geared towards further investment.
- 4. *Create the strategic engagement plan* for each person/organization with a focused goal of increasing philanthropy.**
- 5. *Repeat*, working our way up the engagement scale.**

Currently alumni and friends engage with Western Washington University through multiple decentralized methods and relationships. The number of alumni who regularly connect to faculty, programs, students, staff, athletics, clubs, and a multitude of campus wide efforts is unknown. A comprehensive knowledge of the channel through which they engage and which opportunities they select are unknown.

At present, Western only tracks information in the university's database (Banner) via Advancement staff connections through personal relationships, Alumni Association and Foundation event attendance, gifts

and Alumni Association memberships. In select situations, Western may capture mentoring relationships and legislative advocacy.

This decentralized model only allows an individual campus unit to access a narrow and one-dimensional view of an alumnus' relationship with the university. This limits our ability to manage each campus relationship, and leaves us unable to integrate that alumnus into additional campus activity in order to offer statements of gratitude, demonstrate impact, and further deepen the engagement for long-term investment.

Conversely, a centralized engagement structure that allows for capturing all points of alumni and friends engagement would provide a holistic view of relationships with all parts of the university, resulting in mutually beneficial outcomes.

*Let us consider how this could work. Consider if, collectively, we were aware that an MIS alumnus is part of the MIS alumni Facebook page, and is regularly engaging with hundreds of peer alumni, and that this alumnus recently made a gift for scholarships. Then this alum is invited by a former professor to speak in a class. There is tremendous opportunity to deepen this relationship together. The professor thanks the alum for the recent gift when calling to invite the alumnus to speak; the development director schedules to meet the alumnus while on campus to speak, and talks with the alumnus about inviting MIS Facebook page alumni to get involved with the program. Ultimately, that alum becomes more and more invested, which influences personal philanthropy decisions for Western.*

The WE program can be successful for Western with the following elements and resources:

- Agreement among university administrative and academic leadership that this is key to successful broad-based and targeted engagement as a foundation for the next campaign.
  - Two colleges, Business & Economics and Fine & Performing Arts, have already volunteered to pilot with Advancement for 2018.
  - Advancement Training: The Western Engaged program will include tools and resources required for managing engagement activity. An essential component is training for academic partners focused on relationship and donor cultivation. A professional training organization, Advancement Resources, is conducting these workshops; they started in fall 2017.
- A state-of-the-art campus-wide and central engagement database and tracking structure to capture, assess, measure and potentially predict alumni propensity for meaningful contact with the university.
  - With funds from the university budgeting process, Advancement has already purchased the first data analytics tool, Argos; installation and staff training is in progress
  - A comprehensive relationship management (CRM) software, CRM Advance, has been negotiated as part of the university update contract with Ellucian. Funds came from both Advancement and the university, as is customary for technology projects such as these. We expect installation to begin in July 2018.

- When both of these tools are fully operational, Advancement and the campus will be well positioned for success. In the meantime, we plan to begin data collection with our pilot partners and keep records in a sub-optimal access database.
- Staff to capture, assess, predict and continually engage
  - Advancement leaders understand that engagement is critical and have consequently reworked job positions and staff structures to do this work. Advancement has two vacancies in the alumni unit that will be key to this work. ALL staff will be committed to working with partners across the campus under the rubric of strategic engagement with a goal of personal investment from our alumni and friends, and best-of-class stewardship of their gifts and advocacy.
  - Data will drive decision-making. The more we collectively understand about our alumni and friends' engagements, the more strategic and streamlined we can make our programming, events, stewardship and volunteer opportunities.
  - Continual reporting to campus units will be a high priority to prove concepts are a valuable return on investments.
- Campus to transition to collaborative engagement opportunities
  - Collaborative thinking on how to engage our alumni and friends will open up many more possibilities than a narrow, single-focused effort.
  - Understanding that engagement itself is not the goal, but rather engagement toward increased philanthropy is the outcome, and we can measure that!
  - The engagement continuum:
    - Awareness – Interest – Experience – Participation - Ownership