

**Pomona College Alumni Association
Strategic Plan
July 2005 – June 2010**

The mission of the Pomona College Alumni Association is to enrich and perpetuate the bonds between the College and those who have passed through her gates for their mutual support, growth, and benefit.

FOREWORD

In the spring of 2004, Pomona College President David W. Oxtoby charged the Alumni Association Board of Directors with developing a strategic plan for its next five years. Since then, the Board has worked in collaboration with Alumni Relations staff and an ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee to develop this plan, which was guided by four overarching aspirations. The group engaged in an analysis of the Alumni Association's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats and identified the top six priorities and corresponding strategic measures to meet those priorities. Designed to provide the framework that will allow the Association to meet the aspirations, the priorities and strategic measures aim to address the weaknesses and threats, and build upon the strengths and opportunities of current programming. Upon approval of this plan (anticipated at the June 4, 2005 Alumni Association Board meeting), the Alumni Relations staff and Association Board will develop detailed implementation plans (including resource needs) to execute the strategic measures.

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

The Pomona College Alumni Association operates under a set of bylaws that were last updated on June 7, 2003. Any person who attended Pomona for at least one semester is a member of the Association, regardless of whether they ultimately graduated from Pomona. The Alumni Association Board is composed of 22 members, who are not selected by the general membership, but rather identified and recruited by the Board in consultation with staff of various College departments. The Association's President chairs the Board and serves as an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees, and the Director of Alumni Relations serves as the Association's Treasurer. Other Board officers include the President-Elect and Secretary, who is also a member of the Alumni Relations staff.

Unlike many colleges and universities whose alumni associations collect dues, employ their own staff, and operate independently from their alma mater, the Pomona College Alumni Association is not separately incorporated and relies entirely upon the College for its funding. While the Board, therefore, has neither the fiduciary responsibility over the budget used to support alumni programming, nor the ability to direct the Alumni Relations staff, it is responsible for:

- Developing its five-year strategic plan to be updated by the Board and reviewed with the Vice President for Institutional Advancement on an annual basis;
- Annually outlining short-term goals in line with the strategic plan, as well as developing project plans and allocating volunteers to achieve these goals;
- Measuring the performance of alumni programming relative to the priorities and strategic measures outlined in the strategic plan; and
- Providing ongoing counsel and support to the Director of Alumni Relations on matters related to alumni programming.

Because it is not a traditional membership organization, many see the Alumni Association as comprised only of the Board and other alumni volunteers who are actively involved and engaged in the life of the College. Others do not realize there is an Alumni Association, and see the Association as only the Alumni Relations staff, which is responsible to the College for alumni programming. Finally, because the Association lacks a generally accepted definition of membership and is dependent on the College for providing its necessary financial, human, and other resources, some may argue that there really is no “Alumni Association” as that term is traditionally understood.

Since many Pomona College alumni lack awareness of the Association, the Board considered whether to promote a separate identity for the Alumni Association from the College and concluded that such an effort should not be undertaken. Regardless of how one defines the Association, the general concept that an alumni association works both to build alumni affinity for its alma mater and to serve as the major conduit through which the institution and its alumni interact still applies. Therefore, the “Alumni Association” name remains a valuable identifier for its familiarity to alumni, and especially to current students by helping them to realize their relationship with Pomona College is life-long.

ASPIRATIONS

Consistent with its mission, the Pomona College Alumni Association aspires to:

- 1) Support active, engaging, and relevant programming and networks at the regional community, faculty, and student level;
- 2) Cultivate excitement for Pomona College and its traditions;
- 3) Engage and connect with alumni who reflect the diversity of the College; and
- 4) Identify and cultivate future Pomona College Alumni Association leaders.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Pomona College engaged the services of consultants this past year to survey its alumni and conduct programmatic comparisons with peer colleges. The results of these studies delineated areas of strength and weakness in the alumni relations program, a summary of which follows.

STRENGTHS

The alumni program has a dedicated and committed staff and a small but strong core of dedicated alumni volunteer leaders. This group of people collaborates to produce an exceptional Alumni Weekend program that is the envy of many other colleges. The Symposium program received the CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) Seal of Excellence Award in 2001. The percentage of alumni who return for their reunions is among the highest in the country among liberal arts colleges. Faculty, staff, and students all play an important role in the Alumni Weekend program as well.

Some of the regional areas provide consistently excellent programs featuring a variety of types of events, including faculty speakers. Foremost among these areas is the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, DC. Both of these areas have long-serving alumni volunteer leaders. The faculty members at Pomona play a critical role in regional programming, as survey data shows that faculty lectures are one of the most popular regional events. There have been twice as many regional events featuring faculty members in 2004-2005 as there were the previous year.

The Alumni Office has launched a bi-monthly e-mail newsletter, and the feedback from the alumni readership has been overwhelmingly positive. The newsletter is but one example of a concerted effort to strengthen the frequency and variety of communications sent from the Alumni Office. Blast e-mails advertising reunions augmented Alumni Weekend publicity, and e-mails were sent to local alumni about on-campus events such as faculty luncheon lectures. The soon-to-be-launched Alumni Portal system will replace the current on-line community through Harris Publishing Company. The portal will provide access to the on-line alumni directory that will be accessible by all alumni with Internet access.

The College has achieved a recent increase in the number of alumni contributing to the annual fund, and there could be a correlation between the strengths and improvements in alumni programming and that increase. The offices of alumni relations and annual giving have a strong reciprocal working relationship, and they cooperate to realize their respective goals.

WEAKNESSES

The Alumni Board (and its predecessor Alumni Council) suffers from a lack of direction and purpose. There are wonderfully talented and dedicated Board members, but the role of the Board and its impact on alumni relations programming has not been clearly defined. The strategic planning process can help address this weakness by defining the goals and aspirations for alumni programs. The Board can then recruit and train new volunteers to take leadership positions in the realization of those goals and aspirations. The adoption of clear and measurable long-term objectives and goals will enable the Alumni Board to take a more active and meaningful role in the administration of the alumni relations program at Pomona College. Having roles clearly defined will be the first step in implementing a strong alumni leadership development program than can benefit all offices that utilize alumni volunteers (Admissions, Annual Giving, Career Development, and Alumni Relations).

The data collected from the surveys and comparative studies pointed to several areas where improvements can be made, given the necessary resources. The ratio of Pomona's Alumni Relations staff to alumni is low relative to the other Claremont Colleges and other peer institutions. The small number of professional staff has obvious ramifications for the amount of programming and other alumni services that can be provided. Pomona has not added a full-time professional alumni staff position since 1958, despite the growth of the alumni population base from 12,744 in 1958 to 23,362 in 2005.

Pomona's regional alumni communities suffer from a lack of volunteer engagement and commitment. In response to the increasing difficulty in identifying, training, and stewarding regional alumni volunteers, the professional staff has assumed more responsibility for regional programming. While one could argue that professional staff members are more skilled at event coordination, there has been an accompanying erosion of regional alumni who are willing to assist with these events. Additional staff who can focus on regional programming and leadership development would help reverse this trend.

While the Alumni Relations office provides several very successful student programs, it is clear that with additional staff and resources, more can be done to strengthen the relationship between students and the Alumni Association. Current benefits provided to alumni include alumni career

services, and a systematic communication plan could increase alumni knowledge about such programs and services.

OPPORTUNITIES

Institutional Advancement's plan to increase the size of the Alumni Relations professional staff by one full-time person within the next two years should provide the opportunity to address some of the aforementioned weaknesses. The Director of Alumni Relations is working with the Senior Director of Alumni and Parent Relations to define that position in a way that will provide maximum benefit to the areas of need. Implementation of the strategic measures in the Alumni Association Strategic Plan may require additional resources.

The implementation of the new CARS/CX database will finally provide the long awaited system that will enable us to track our alumni more effectively through their volunteer experience. The capability to track event attendance will also assist in the area of volunteer recruitment, as the staff can query the database to identify alumni who have consistently attended their reunions and other alumni events.

THREATS

The biggest threat to the success of the alumni relations program is changing demographics. A Penn State study states, "Baby boomers, an increasing percentage of alumni, are not as charitable with time or financial resources as previous generations. Outreach to younger alumni and an increasing population of diverse alumni is vital." Pomona's Alumni Office staff is finding this to be true, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit for volunteer positions such as reunion class event chair—a position that just a few years ago was highly sought-after. This underscores the need to bolster both student and young alumni programming so we can engage these young people as future alumni leaders.

SIX TOP STRATEGIC PLANNING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY 1: Create opportunities that maximize the Association's impact and reach in the alumni population, involving alumni in the life of the College and promoting the benefits of mutual active engagement.

RATIONALE: This priority supports the Association's first aspiration regarding programming. The Association must deploy its finite human and financial resources for maximum impact and broadest reach. Continuing to grow participation rates across the spectrum of Association programs and services must be a priority to engage the growing alumni body with the College over time. Programs that do not draw sufficient numbers to justify continuation need to be better marketed, restructured, or eliminated to allow for the creation of new modes of alumni engagement. Benchmarking data indicates that career services, in particular, may be an area for engaging large numbers of alumni in the future.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- Increase alumni attendance at events, programs, traditions, and other activities.
- Increase the number of alumni volunteers and leaders
- Increase the percentage of and amount raised from alumni donors.

- Increase visibility of and access to current opportunities for involvement.
 - Increase number, variety, and scope of continuing education opportunities.
 - Increase support for and use of alumni career services.
 - Increase tradition-based programming that promotes common experiences.
 - Increase regional programming that supports the reasons a region was identified as a priority.
 - Research the development of strategic relationships with other colleges to promote educational and programming efforts.
 - Increase participation by Alumni Board members in their regional communities.
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PRIORITY 2: Support and encourage a culture of personal and professional networking among alumni and also with alumni and the current College community.

RATIONALE: This priority directly reflects the mission of the Pomona College Alumni Association, and further addresses the Association’s first aspiration concerning alumni networks. While it is apparent that Alumni Weekend, some regional communities, and online class connections provide good avenues for networking among alumni, it is felt the Association could do more in this area. More specifically, an open attitude toward networking at both the personal and professional levels is a culture that the Association believes will benefit current and future alumni, and ultimately, the College. Alumni who develop and maintain connections with other alumni will have a greater bond with the College.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- Develop the online community to allow alumni to identify interests or affinity groups in which they feel connected, and allow them to search for others who have made similar identifications.
 - Increase promotion of alumni career services.
 - Identify and develop five self-sustaining, alumni affinity groups for future aspiring affinity groups to model.
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PRIORITY 3: Cultivate excitement among current students about their lifelong engagement with Pomona College.

RATIONALE: This priority helps to address the Association’s second aspiration, excitement, by highlighting the Association’s potential role on campus. Many perceive the Association’s link with current students as a weakness. The Association needs to promote to current students the opportunities that will be available to them as alumni, so that there is no gap in engagement with the College as a student becomes an alumnus. The Association must find ways to model the possibilities for lifelong engagement to students in ways that will excite them about their future as alumni. The creation and perpetuation of College traditions may offer opportunities to achieve this goal.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- Increase the Association’s visibility among students.
- Maintain campus traditions as reasons for alumni to come back to campus.

- Highlight the diversity of alumni.
 - Educate students about networking opportunities.
 - Engage students in Alumni Weekend, particularly in the context of affinity groups.
 - Ask students what the Association can do for them.
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PRIORITY 4: Increase the diversity of alumni engaged in the life of the College and the activities of the Alumni Association.

RATIONALE: This priority directly addresses the Association’s third aspiration, diversity. Data shows that the current student body and more recent graduates are more economically and ethnically diverse than earlier generations of alumni. In order for the Association and the College to remain relevant to these younger alumni and students, the programming, leadership, and volunteer base of the Association must better reflect their diversity than that of earlier generations of alumni.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- Increase the degree to which engaged alumni reflect the diversity of the student body.
 - Increase the degree to which Alumni Association activities reflect the diverse interests of the entire alumni body.
 - Highlight the diversity of alumni.
 - Align the diversity goals of the Alumni Association with those of the College.
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PRIORITY 5: The Alumni Association will develop a program for identifying, recruiting, training, and placing key alumni to serve as lead volunteers in such traditional areas as regional community and reunion events and in broader leadership roles/capacities such as the Alumni Board. As a corollary, the Alumni Association will communicate and promote to students and alumni the inherent value of volunteering for and assuming volunteer leadership roles in support of the College. The Association will actively pursue creation of additional alumni awards to recognize and reward alumni leadership and professional/community accomplishments.

RATIONALE: This priority addresses the Association’s fourth aspiration, Volunteer Leadership. The insufficient size of the general volunteer pool, difficulty and lack of implementation of existing process in finding dynamic volunteer leaders, and uncertainty among alumni as to how to access leadership positions are Association weaknesses. Research also shows that the Association must be more persistent in developing younger alumni into volunteer leaders.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- Create an Alumni Leadership Search Committee charged with identifying alumni with high/strong leadership abilities, or “L.Q.” (= Leadership Quotient).
- Develop mechanisms and processes for identifying, recruiting, placing, and tracking new alumni volunteers and potential lead volunteers.
- Establish an annual leadership training program responsive to specific Association needs and offering added benefits of leadership skills applicable in other activities.

- Develop a system to encourage, identify, engage, and retain current students and recent graduates for alumni activities and eventual key volunteer/leadership roles.
- Evaluate established alumni awards and create new ways to recognize and reward alumni leadership and professional/community accomplishments, as an integral part of leadership development.

PRIORITY 6: Maximize the opportunities for alignment and synergy between Alumni Association programming and the Institutional Advancement departments that focus on alumni donations, to create a stronger culture of giving among alumni, students, faculty, and staff.

RATIONALE: Increasing alumni financial contributions to the College is not explicitly included in any of the Association’s four aspirations; however, mutual support between the College and its alumni is part of the Association’s mission. The alumni body has been shown through research to have untapped potential for giving back to the College, and this Priority reflects the belief that Alumni Association programming and the influence of alumni “word of mouth” can positively affect giving habits. Therefore, the Association should work to maximize synergy with other Institutional Advancement departments, particularly Annual Giving. Additionally, the Association should allocate staff and volunteer resources based, at least in part, on the potential to positively influence alumni giving.

STRATEGIC MEASURES

- **Training:** Train Association volunteers to articulate the case for giving as ambassadors for Annual Fund. Focus on in Years I – II.
- **Volunteer Giving:** Expand the tradition of 100% of the Alumni Board member participation in the Annual Fund to all Alumni Association volunteers. Focus on in Years I – II.
- **Communication:** Increase success of Annual Fund events that can be promoted through Alumni Association channels. Focus on in Years I – III.
- **Key Event Giving:** Increase donation rate tied to key Association events (i.e. Alumni Weekend). Focus on in Years II – IV.
- **Students & Young Alumni:** Increase the understanding of students and young alumni about the importance of giving back to the College, as part of the broader messaging from Institutional Advancement. Focus on in Years III – V.