Alumni Board Meeting Minutes
April 2012

Thursday, April 12, 2012

Present: Brenda Berkman, Nikki Brock-Maruska, Andrea Dittmann, Sam Dotzler, Paul Finley, Sandy Jerstad, Kate Johnson, Katherine Kroeger, Mitch Lehn, Vijay Mehrotra, Brock Metzger, Mickey Monsen, Kate Pearce, Gary Perkins, Jennifer Sawyer, Rebecca Taibl, Bruce Wahl, Maggie Wells

Visitors present for at least a portion of the day: Allen Baker, Sheri Eichhorn, Heidi Quiram, Kathy Schuurman, Nathan Soland, Janet Kringen Thompson

The meeting opened with devotions led by Sandy Jerstad.

Board of Regents Report
Kate Pearce, Alumni Board President and liaison to the Board of Regents, shared an update:

- The Regents had a retreat meeting in February and will meet again in May. One of the board’s main focal points is the strategic plan. The main tenets of the current strategic plan are academic excellence, the St. Olaf experience or culture, and fiscal sustainability. The board also received a presentation from Jim Langley, the consultant hired to advise St. Olaf on the next capital campaign. The timeline for the campaign is not yet set; the college is currently focusing on strengthening the prospect pool and transitioning to a new database.
- President Anderson and leaders of the Advancement Division are having conversations about hiring a new vice president. There is no time frame for this hire. Leadership is thinking thoughtfully about how best to fill this position and structure the division.
- As of March 6th, the endowment was at $339.6 million.
- The Development Office is 80% of the way towards its goal of raising $25 million, and has 27 new members of the Manitou Heights Society towards a goal of 64 new members.
- The search for a new college pastor and director of the newly-named Center for Vocation and Career are in full swing. Expect to fill both positions by the end of this semester.
- President Anderson is spending time thinking about and talking about the value of a liberal arts education. St. Olaf is perceived to be at the forefront of this issue.
- The college is also working on showing new graduate salaries, planning on making reported data public.

Show and Tell
Board members shared anecdotes and reflections on their involvement with St. Olaf and other Oles.

- Examples shared included: monthly dinners, networking events, the Black & Gold Winter Gala, Young Alum Holiday Party, enhancing the connection between Northfield & St. Olaf and Carleton & St. Olaf, working with students on a drunk driving awareness initiative, Christmas Festival simulcast and related events, new student welcome picnics, lefse making events, St. Olaf Choir receptions, book clubs, theater event, happy hours, students shadowing alums over Spring Break, skating party, connections with students studying off campus for Interim, Day of Service, St. Olaf on the Road, NAHA event, informal social gatherings, ski events, ballroom dance class, St. Olaf Band tour, golf outing in Naples, informal chats with prospective students and their parents, Career Network for Oles, connecting with Oles in major industries in the area, and alumni awards.
Working Groups
The board broke into three working groups for the rest of the afternoon, tackling the questions of social media engagement, the alumni-admissions program, and the alumni awards program/process. Each group was tasked with discussing that initiative, and to bring one big question back to the meeting for board members to mull over during the evening. The questions were:

Social media: How do you define success with social media?
Alumni-Admissions: How can we broaden the number of applicants by involving alums and parents?
Alumni awards: Should we consider changing DSA to Outstanding Volunteer Award and add a St. Olaf Spirit Award?

Working Dinner
Dinner was shared with Kris Vatter, Director of Student Activities, who shared thoughts and stories on student life and trends of student involvement.

Friday, April 13, 2012

Present: Brenda Berkman, Andrea Dittmann, Sam Dotzler, Paul Finley, Kate Johnson, Mitch Lehn, Nikki Brock-Maruska, Vijay Mehrotra, Mickey Monsen, Kate Pearce, Gary Perkins, Jennifer Sawyer, Rebecca Taibl, Bruce Wahl, Sandy Jerstad, Magdalena Wells, Katherine Kroeger

Absent: Brock Metzger

Guests in attendance for at least a portion of the day: Allen Baker, Enoch Blazis, Sheri Eichhorn, Martha Kunau, Rebecca Otten, Heidi Quiram, Kathy Schuurman, Nathan Soland, incoming SAA Coordinator Kari Swanson, Janet Kringen Thompson, Dave Wagner

The meeting was called to order by Kate Pearce.

Student Alumni Association Report
Current SAA Coordinator Andrea Dittmann and incoming SAA Coordinator Kari Swanson presented an update on what has been going on with student life the past few months.

- Two etiquette dinners were held in February, with 50 attendees each.
- SAA sponsored a Donor Appreciation Week. Staffed a table with students talking about the importance of donors, coordinated with the Senior Campaign kick-off.
- ABC Breakfast – students were partnered with Alumni Board Members to network over breakfast in the Caf.
- The Day of Service is coming up. Students will join projects in the Twin Cities and Northfield.
- SAA members are having discussions about a possible event around finals, “words of encouragement” – soliciting alums to share words of encouragement and creating a display in Buntrock during Finals Week
- Men’s Hockey made it to the MIAC Championship game, but took 2nd place. The fan bus to Gustavus was a big hit.
- Earlier this year Bon Apétit sponsored a coffee taste test to create a St. Olaf specific blend. The campus community was encouraged to taste and vote for a favorite. There was also a contest to name it and the winning entry was “Java Yah Yah.”
- Ingrid Michaelson is the spring concert artist. 900 tickets sold out in 12 hours.
- President’s Ball is tomorrow night in Buntrock.
- Senior Art Show opens later this month, Veselica has their spring show tonight, and the theater department has their spring production this month.
- The campus community is buzzing about STO Talks, a student’s senior project featuring 15 speakers – a mix of students, faculty, and alumni.
Kari Swanson introduced herself. Further discussion about the possible finals event that Andrea mentioned, the senior campaign, and Career Network for Oles. Conversation about a discussion on the college’s LinkedIn alumni page about the rising cost of St. Olaf tuition and college tuition in general.

**Alumni Awards Committee Report**
Gary Perkins reported on the Alumni Award Committee activity in the past year. In 2011, nominations and supporting information for eight awards (nine people, because one nomination was for a married couple) came in. The 2012 selection committee met in early March to review nomination materials and to discuss the candidates.

Gary briefly described the accomplishments of the three nominees. Discussion regarding fewer number of awards being given this year than the last few years. Comment made that bringing one committee member in to the discussion via video conferencing worked well.

Kate led the voting for each candidate. Each passed with a majority of votes. These nominations should remain confidential until the nominations have been approved by the Board of Regents and each person has been contacted.

Gary made a plea to get started on nominations for the coming year. Gathering supporting information is a challenging part of the process, but the first hurdle is receiving names for nomination. Kathy Schuurman shared some folders started on nominations that she’s received and asked that board members approach her if they’re interested in moving the nomination forward. Recommendation was made to really push this program directly after Reunion Weekend when alums have recently reconnected with classmates, and also to enhance the marketing for this program.

**Alumni Board Member Nominations**
Bruce Wahl reported on nominations for new Alumni Board members. Approximately 100 nominees came in, solicited from current and past board members, current volunteers, and St. Olaf staff. A meeting was previously held between Kate Pearce, Nathan Soland, and the outgoing board members: Brenda Berkman, Mickey Monsen, and Bruce Wahl. Nine nominees were discussed, three from each representative area that is being vacated (D.C., New York, Post 50th Reunion).

Bruce briefly described each nominee. Kate called for a vote. Each passed with a majority of votes. These nominations should remain confidential until each person has been contacted.

Recommendation was made that once the new members have agreed to serve that they receive a pre-training regarding this commitment, perhaps receive some mentoring from the outgoing board member in their area and also a current board member.

**Housekeeping Issues**
Since the meeting was running ahead of schedule, Nathan brought up some housekeeping issues.

The meeting broke for Chapel.

**Presentation by Jim Langley**
St. Olaf hired consultant Jim Langley in 2012 to help the college think about the next campaign. Jim presented on the topic of engagement, saying that the world of alumni relations has changed over the last 25 years. Nationally, alumni participation and annual giving have declined for 18 straight years. So American education is facing a challenge to its funding structure and needs to rethink how and where it gets its money.

Jim recently researched why alumni giving has decreased. The top answer was “I’ve paid enough in tuition already.” In the last 25 years the average tuition has increased by 400%, outstripping every other
industry. It has now reached a point where the “core value” proposition is being challenged. Earlier, alumni concluded that the value of the education greatly exceeded the cost, so they decide to give back and want to make opportunities available to the next generation.

The following four reasons for not giving were “I don’t think they really need the money,” “my donations go into a black hole,” “they don’t connect with me beyond asking for money,” and “I don’t feel a strong emotional connection to my alma mater.” Jim reminded his audience that alma mater means “nourishing mother.” Alums wants to feel cared for and emotionally attended to by the institution.

President Anderson has set a goal of increasing tuition in the near future only by the consumer price index + 1%. His message has been clear that the cost of higher education must come down. The college’s promise is that it will control costs while maintaining the St. Olaf experience and services offered to students, preserving the institution and opportunities for future generations.

Jim stated that, as we move into a campaign, we cannot count success only by dollars. We must also count the number and strength of relationships with our alumni. In order for a campaign to be successful, it must leave in its wake a stronger community. Alumni are both preservers of tradition and guides for a changing future. We must engage a diverse cross-section of alumni or we will end up with an oligarchy of support that is narrowly focused.

Jim’s questions for the board to consider were: How do we reach new people? How do we amplify our efforts? How can we build a truly St. Olaf-specific campaign, unique to our culture and treasures? What causes people to be less engaged than we want and how can we reverse that trend?

One of the main themes in the rest of the discussion had to do with clearly communicating to incoming students and creating rituals to connect to.

Message: The message should be “welcome, we hope you have a wonderful time, we hope you prosper here. You have been given a gift. St. Olaf has been created by previous generations and we want you to reflect on these contributions, some of which are noticeable and some of which are quiet. We want you to recognize this gift and leverage it into a rewarding career. And eventually we want you to remember that generations will come in behind you and how will you respond?”

We need to consider what generations of Oles cherish about the college, what they want to preserve, and what they recognize as needing to adapt to move forward. We want to tap into the idea of collectivity that all Americans share, and let our alums know that we have listened to them, have heard what they said, identify what we value together and then establish how we can move forward. We don’t want any alum to feel like “you’re leaving me out,” but you can’t be everything to everyone to the point that there’s no direction. What is the promise of St. Olaf today? We have to answer this question for the current generation. What are the bragging points that distinguish us? All of those points can be applied to the coming campaign.

Rituals: Jim shared stories of other colleges that create rituals in a variety of times throughout the alum’s life, incoming ceremonies, Homecoming rituals, etc. There was animated discussion around the idea of rituals. Board members shared stories and examples of connections, rituals they were part of, a “place they plugged in” to the St. Olaf community, and new rituals like freshman signing the book and lanterns at graduation. Recommendation was made to start rituals and the building of community with the new board members coming on in November.

Working Lunch
Lunch was shared with the annual fund staff and fund board members. President Anderson delivered a presentation.
**Working Groups**

Working groups met briefly again, and then returned to lead discussion on their area.

**Alumni-Admissions Program**

Maggie Wells presented. She reviewed the main question considered by this group: how can we broaden the number of applicants by involving alums and parents? Many good things happened in the last year, the first year that the process was more formalized.

The working group focused on two different issues:

1) ways to expand efforts in current target markets
2) ways to involve alums and parents in the Metro area, where students have better access to campus

Many ideas were generated. A few were highlighted for board members:

- Clearly define the various roles for volunteers and provide a tool kit for volunteers
- Capture more data from graduating seniors so Admissions office knows where youngest alums will be residing, so this particular audience can be captured for this program
- Doing recruiting for this program and/or training for volunteers during major weekends on campus
- Match parent volunteers deliberately with prospective parents (perhaps from same high school)
- Empowering academic departments in recruiting efforts, e.g., inviting to talks on campus

Because we’re not through the full enrollment cycle yet, we’re looking forward to seeing what the yield is in the target markets after these efforts. Dave Wagner would be interested in reconnecting with this working group at the November meeting to continue the discussion.

Question was posed about how volunteers were recruited for this pilot year. Dave responded that the Admissions staff carefully identified and contacted specific individuals rather than casting a wide net, so that they could carefully roll out this program and be intentional about how it moves forward. This could be tweaked in the future, as we see how successful the program is and as it starts to run efficiently.

**Alumni Awards**

Gary Perkins presented. This working group posed the question: how can we gain more value from the alumni awards? To answer it, the working group looked at defining the awards, reviewing the process, and considering marketing. Gary reminded board members of the broader purpose of the awards, which is more than straight recognition of distinguished alumni. He reviewed the process, from the call for nominations to recognition of the recipients on Founder’s Day.

Ideas for award definition:

- Change Distinguished Service Award to Outstanding Service Award
- Add a new award, St. Olaf Spirit Award (suggestion that APR office would make this nomination, awarded to a volunteer who did outstanding work for St. Olaf in the past year)
- Limit to 1 per year for each of these

Nomination process:

- Need to make it easier to identify prospects, to get names in the pool
- APR will start pre-populating parts of the packet, to make the compilation of packets easier

Marketing:

- More strongly promote the awards in general
- Leverage them elsewhere – use awards as a recruiting tool, use the video created for Founder’s Day in other ways
Recommendation was made to change new award to “Spirit of St. Olaf,” a subtle but important difference. Discussion was had regarding the criteria for this award.

Outstanding Service Award is proposed instead of Outstanding Volunteer. It seems that the word “service” really does capture the purpose of the award. It also creates continuity from people who have received the award in the past.

This working group still needs to flesh out the details for the criteria on the changed and new award, and on the marketing plan. Nathan brought up the option of a standing sub-committee of the Alumni Board for the Alumni Awards.

**Social Media**

Sam Dotzler presented. This working group saw social media as a subset of an overall engagement strategy that is being developed. The rest of the process will include flushing out the tactics, mapping the process and defining key performance indices, and then executing and refining.

The objective is to drive awareness, get people to engage with it, and then continue that engagement behavior. Need to define the timing and discuss a budget and staff power needed for this effort.

The approach is to engage alumni through low cost technology, coupled with proven peer to peer networking (not meant to replace current initiatives). There are three strategies: sell, educate and connect, and this working group has brainstormed some tactics for each, with the intention to refine and enhance before the next Alumni Board meeting.

Next steps:

- Facebook audit – what’s out there right now
- Develop a toolkit for volunteers on using social media (best practices)
- Testing: start with Chicago, San Francisco, Class of 2003
- Review: how successful were these efforts in each of those test markets

Discussion about using existing content from St. Olaf web site (not inventing things from scratch), engaging more volunteers to deliver the content, privacy issues, and setting parameters for appropriate content.

**Wrap-Up**

Nathan reminded everyone of the next meeting dates:

- Nov. 1–2, 2012 (Founder’s Day on Friday)
- April 11–12, 2013 (planned around Day of Service, St. Olaf spring break and Easter)
- Nov 7–8, 2013 (Founder’s Day on Friday)

The three outgoing board members shared a connection to or memory about the college and the meeting concluded.