

## NEAT GRANT PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

### **Describe the purpose of the Grant Project.**

Capturing alumni feedback and understanding perceptions was critical to determining the future engagement needs of our very large, public, urban research intensive institution. It was imperative that we took the steps necessary to collect this feedback in order to incorporate data driven decision making into our future alumni engagement and outreach efforts to ensure we continue to offer programs and services that are valuable to our graduates.

### **Describe the scope of the Grant Project, the alumni relations-related research topic area explored and the constituency group that was involved.**

In order to accomplish this, we partnered with the Performance Enhancement Group (PEG) to administer the 2015 Alumni Attitude Study (AAS). We were excited to again participate in the study, as it was last administered by our institution in 2007. More than 250 universities and associations have used the AAS to increase alumni engagement. According to PEG, no other market research program offers the breadth of alumni data, depth of statistical analysis, and actionable findings. We promoted the study widely to our 285,000 UC alumni and were extremely pleased to receive over 5,000 responses to the survey. This was a huge participation increase from our 2007 distribution, which resulted in just over 800 responses. This increase in participation enabled us to gain a more universal alumni perspective as well as capture valuable insight into alumni satisfaction, which was long overdue.

### **Describe the process and timeline used to implement the Grant Project.**

In partnership with PEG, we designed the survey instrument the Summer of 2015. We tested the instrument, and began distribution to all alumni via email in early August 2015. The following week, we also began running social media promotions and ads. We also followed up with two reminder emails to alumni who had not clicked on the survey link. We stopped promotions at the end of September, after receiving over 5,000 responses. From there, the survey results were analyzed and reports were generated over the course of the Fall of 2015. In January 2016, our UCAA leadership team was presented the results of our study's findings from PEG and in February 2016, we presented those results to key constituents through a series of presentations to our alumni association and foundation volunteers, foundation leadership and campus community. In February and April 2016, we hosted open forums in our alumni center and online via GoToMeetings and invited all foundation, university communications, student services, and athletics staff as well as the university's diversity and inclusion office and volunteers.

**Attach separately or include in the report your survey instrument, if applicable.**

The survey instrument for the University of Cincinnati 2015 Alumni Attitude Study can be found online at <http://sgiz.mobi/s3/UC-2015-AAS>.

**Discuss your methodology for the process and/or survey.**

We distributed the survey three times via email. The first and second time, we sent through Vertical Response to capture valuable open/click information, and were able to send targeted promotions based off of the data we collected. For our third and final email send, we sent through our regular email system, which did not have tracking capabilities.

Based on the total number of emailable alumni we have, the consultants believed we should have set a goal of approximately 3,000 completions. We set a stretch goal of 5,000. We have a highly active alumni and university community on social media, and we wanted to extend our promotions beyond email. We developed a social media ambassador kit with canned posts and pictures and shared with our alumni staff and volunteers to help spread the word about the study and we invested some of the grant funds into social media promotions. This proved to be extremely valuable as nearly 30% of our responses came through social media, as evidenced through the unique survey links that were utilized in promotions for the various social platforms.

Promotional prizes were a big part of our marketing strategy. In addition to letting alumni know we wanted to hear from them, we also promoted daily prize drawings and two grand prizes—one to be distributed midway through distribution (iPad Mini) and one grand prize at the end of the survey distribution (iWatch). We gained extremely valuable feedback from over 5,000 alumni, and even more, we captured over 3,600 contact updates as the result of alumni entering-to-win the daily prize drawings upon survey completion.

**AAS Responses by Targeted Message Type:**

Email - 3,451 (68.8%)

*Note: The first AAS email was sent to 100,345 alumni and two additional AAS reminder emails were sent; estimated 3.44% response rate via email.*

Facebook - 1,324 (26.4%)

LinkedIn - 39 (less than 1%)

E-Newsletter - 39 (less than 1%)

Twitter - 115 (2.3%)

Website - 48 (less than 1%)

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**AAS Total Responses: 5,016**

**Provide a listing of the final Grant Project budget and how grant money was allocated.**

Professional Fees—approximately \$15,000-\$20,000 (UCAA funded)

Promotional Expenses—approximately \$2,000 (NEAT Grant Program funded)

<b>\$842</b>	Vertical Response email credits for open/click tracking and targeted resends
<b>\$180</b>	Promotional buck slip printing for inclusion in UCAA annual giving thank you letters
<b>\$636</b>	Prizes used in survey promotions—mid-survey prize iPad mini; grand prize iWatch
<b>\$134</b>	Facebook ads promoting survey participation and daily/grand prizes
<b>\$200</b>	UC Under Armour apparel (25) promoted as daily promotional prizes

**Provide a brief summary of your findings.**

- 97% of UC alumni, in retrospect, consider their decision to attend UC to be “good” or “great.” That is up from 95% eight years earlier. The percentage calling their decision “great” outpaces the national average.
- 93% of UC alumni say they had a good to excellent student experience.
- The UC Satisfaction Index, which is built around responses pertaining to their opinion of the university, decision to attend, willingness to promote the university to others, and their alumni experience, is 82% compared to the national average of 79%.
- Perhaps the most critical factor in alumni’s minds is the perceived value of their UC degrees. This is influenced not only by their student experience some years ago and their ongoing alumni experience, but also by how they perceive UC’s overall reputation and ongoing progress now. (If they sense UC is on an upward trajectory today, that enhances the value of the degrees they earned 10, 20 or 30 years earlier.)
- 91% of alumni feel that value and respect for the UC degree has a “critical” or “significant” impact on their opinion of UC. This is slightly higher than the survey results from 2006.
- Other items with a strong impact on alumni opinion are school ranking, the availability of scholarships, and student accomplishments. Interestingly, the success of Bearcats athletics has a greater impact on our alumni’s opinion about UC overall than the national average.
- UC scores quite high when alumni are asked, in retrospect, how well their UC educations prepared them for life.

- More than is found among other schools' alumni (and significantly more than they did a decade ago), UC grads tend to promote their university to others.

When asked what one or two things are most important to you as a UC alumnus, the top responses include “Reputation,” “Communication,” “Networking,” “Staying connected,” “The value of my degree,” and “Pride.” Alumni appreciate seeing UC become stronger in these areas; consequently, these variables translate into a desire to be more involved as alumni and ultimately support the university however they’re able (which typically changes over the years).

When asked what UC can do for them over the next 5-10 years that would be most meaningful, leading responses included “Keep me informed,” “Continue to improve,” and “Continue to grow.”

**Provide a brief summary of your conclusions.**

We were pleased to learn that alumni are generally more pleased with their decision to attend, student experience, and overall satisfaction with UC than last time we surveyed them. We also learned that the most important thing to UC alumni is the value of their degree, enabling us to continue to share with them features and highlights from the university that continually show an increased value for the degree they earned years or decades ago, as this significantly impacts their overall opinion of the university. We also learned that our alumni are strong promoters of our institution—even more so than when compared to our list of peer comparatives and the national average. This was very exciting to learn.

**Provide a brief summary of the impacts this project will have on the future of your alumni association/office programming.**

We want our alumni to know we hear them. We intend to keep putting resources toward those areas that mean the most to alumni, and intend to make it easier and more rewarding to be active in the UC alumni community. We are already applying some of the lessons learned through this survey to our daily work; specifically, we are continue to invite people to attend events—even though they told us they may never come. We are proactively and more regularly sharing post-event outcomes, including meaningful stories and photos, with all alumni through newsletters, our website and social media. Additionally, we are telling our alumni more stories and good news related to the areas they told us they are most interested in. We know that almost all alumni who completed the survey promote UC at least occasionally, and we want to ensure we equip them with the valuable information to share.

As we continue to build our aspirant alumni organization, we will incorporate many of the responsibilities related to programming areas that alumni value greatly and want more of, like professional networking, career development and mentoring, into new position roles and responsibilities.