



KDG and ReachBright present:

**A SHORT GUIDE TO CURRENT STUDENTS:
THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN
ADMISSIONS AND ADVANCEMENT**

INTRODUCTION

THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN ADMISSIONS AND ADVANCEMENT

With dropout rates high and retention rates low, it has never been more important for colleges and universities to take the necessary steps they need to in order to engage their current students. In higher ed, it may seem like you spend half of your time worrying about enrollment and the other half fretting about alumni relations, but you're missing something very vital in between.

Current students are the link between both enrollment and alumni relations. Not only does engaging them now lead to better chances of them becoming engaged alumni in the future, but engaging your current students drives the creation of an important, inexpensive, and effective group of marketers on which your admissions and advancement depend. You can't afford to lose their engagement.

THIS GUIDE CAN HELP

At KDG, we've helped colleges and universities both big and small find better ways to increase student engagement. We understand that engaging students positively impacts your school's enrollment and development both now and in the future. We have spent over 16 years creating tech solutions that help colleges around the country measure student sentiment and build school spirit. Through the years, we've watched as colleges and universities have gone on to develop more meaningful relationships with their students and have seen tremendous improvements in both admissions and advancement as a result.

In this brief guide, we'll help you come to a fuller understanding of why current students are so important to your school's future. We'll also give you some tips on how to better engage them so that the impact they make on your campus now lasts for generations to come.

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YOUR HIDDEN HIGHER ED MARKETING PROS

HIGHER ED PEER PRESSURE

Young prospective students do a ton of research when it comes to choosing the college or university they would like to attend after they graduate high school. However, perhaps these prospects are most swayed, not by the words they read in the glossy marketing brochures or the images they see on school websites, but by current college students. Close in age, these students may be older siblings, neighbors, cousins, former high school classmates, or team members. These relationships may not even be personal. In fact, these prospects and students may only know each other as Facebook friends and Twitter followers.

However, no matter how much money you spend on marketing strategies and online campaigns, prospects are more likely to apply to a school that their friends and peers (both in person and online) speak highly of. In many ways, current students are a group of hidden high ed marketing pros. They wield more influence than perhaps any other marketing strategy can.

MAKE SURE THEY HAVE GOOD THINGS TO SAY

Current students advertise your school when they talk to younger friends, when they call high school siblings, or when they simply post an image of campus on Instagram. As a result, when it comes down to whether or not you want your current students to market your school, it's not an option that you have much control over.

However, your actions over the course of students' four years can determine whether or not these students have good things to say. This is why engaging them, identifying those who are having positive experiences, and recognizing those who may be at risk is so important. In addition, because current students are already actively marketing your school informally, using them to help with your marketing campaigns will give you slight control over the message being sent out. One of the best (and cheapest) ways to do this? Social media.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TIP: THE (FREE) POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

THE PERFECT SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGERS

There is no better cost-effective marketing strategy than social media and there are no better social media managers than your current students.¹ After all, perhaps no one knows how to use social media better than today's college students, given that roughly 90% of young adults use social media on a daily basis.²

However, did you know that well over 60% of high school students use social media as one of the ways to research colleges?³

55% of high school students use Facebook to review a college's background and reputation.³

Prospects and current students are connected now more than ever before thanks to social media and social sharing. Whatever your current students post on their own personal social media pages, chances are that a group of prospective students is seeing it. Labels such as hashtags make it even easier for prospects to simply search for the name of a school and find both the good and the bad that's posted about it. However, if your students are actively engaged on campus, you won't have to worry about the bad.

AUTHENTICITY IS KEY

A student's voice on social media is authentic, and authenticity and transparency are exactly what prospects and alumni want to see. Traditional marketing materials like brochures, magazines, and commercials sometimes have a way of seeming staged. Meanwhile, students' own pictures of dorm life and campus events, as well as their stories about classes, research projects, and studying abroad, are more relatable and more accurately capture the average student experience.

CONNECTING WITH ALUMNI

It's also important to consider the benefits social media connections can have when it comes to alumni relations. Some schools are implementing social media pages where current students and alumni can connect. Perhaps one of the biggest burdens current students face lies not during their time in the classroom, but during the time after they graduate, when they make the transition from students to young alumni.

However, social media can help make this change a little smoother than it may normally be.⁴ Having a community of alumni at the ready to help them with their job search or answer their career questions is a sure way for current students to reflect more fondly on their school, its community, and its resources. In addition, current students who have positive experiences and interactions with engaged alumni are more likely to become engaged alumni themselves in the future.

Having students running social media will also make sure that posts are updated regularly and prospects, alumni, and others in the community are kept current with the latest news and trends.¹

QUICK TIP

Make sure your social media team and marketing department are working closely with your admissions department. A surprising number of schools separate these two offices. However, businesses wouldn't recruit new customers without commercials, flyers, and other ads, so why would a college try to recruit new students without its own marketing strategy?

BRINGING STUDENTS AND ALUMNI TOGETHER

BRING YOUR ALUMNI BACK TO CAMPUS

Social media isn't the only way to connect your current students and alumni. There are several other ways to bring your alumni and current students closer together, both online and in person.

Alumni want to see the good work your school is doing and are more likely to donate because of it. Meanwhile, current students who see an active alumni community will start to appreciate alumni engagement early on.

It's important to get alumni involved. Transform them into people who are more than quotes in glossy brochures or faces on roadside billboards. Turn them into people who have a regular, physical, and important presence on campus.⁵ For example:

- Involve them in the very beginning of a student's cycle, such as during admissions interviews or campus tours.
- Bring them back to campus to help lead seminars, conferences, speeches, and other ceremonies or events.
- Allow them to share their knowledge of the workplace by becoming career center volunteers, job shadow hosts, or even resume reviewers.

QUICK TIP

If you're a small school, you actually have an advantage over larger universities when it comes to alumni giving. Studies have found that schools with less than 3,000 students have higher numbers of alumni engagement. The close community small schools are able to form is a major factor in this success.⁶

A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

No matter how you get your alumni involved on campus, it's important that they are given the opportunity to see your current students in action. Meanwhile, it's just as important that your current students see your alumni giving back their skills, their experience, their time, and (in the case of crowdfunding campaigns) even their money. This spirit of giving is something that will stick with them and hopefully remain.

Think of current student engagement and alumni engagement as a symbiotic relationship. Your current student engagement cannot thrive without the participation of your alumni. Likewise, your alumni engagement cannot hope to survive if alumni don't see the mission of your school (and the funds from their own pockets) paying off in the form of the accomplishments of your current students.



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TIP: IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY FOR CROWDFUNDING

START EARLY

If colleges are wondering why they struggle to engage their alumni, they should take a look back at how they engaged those alumni when they were still students. Giving current students the opportunity to have an impact on the school's future is a sure way to attain their engagement early on, giving them not only the experience of philanthropy, but instilling in them an early appreciation for it. Engaged students now turn into engaged alumni in the future.

**\$57.48
BILLION**

**The total amount donated to the
education sector in 2015.⁷**

IT TAKES A CROWD

With their reliance on small donations, crowdfunding and day of giving campaigns are the perfect opportunity for colleges to get current students engaged, active on campus, and filled with school spirit.

While the total amount of money raised is important, it's the amount of students, alumni, and others who have donated that's considered most heavily when yearly school rankings are created. After a crowdfunding campaign, instead of looking at the money raised, a school should instead ask itself: how many students donated and what can we do to keep this engagement strong for years to come?

We at KDG have spent well over a decade helping colleges and universities launch successful and record-breaking giving campaigns. Through this experience, we've

found that interactive and gamified crowdfunding campaigns work best. They're more engaging and more likely to be shared on social media, which influences more current students to donate

STUDENT-CROWDFUNDED PROJECTS



Another great way to inspire students to donate is to launch crowdfunding campaigns, not for the school, but for students themselves. Taking a page from popular sites like GoFundMe and Kickstarter, many schools are experimenting with crowdfunded student projects and are experiencing firsthand the excitement and innovation such campaigns can elicit.

For example, the University of Pittsburgh has had considerable success when it comes to crowdfunding projects. Clubs, organizations, and other groups of students can start a campaign for new sports equipment, guest speakers, field trips, and much more.⁸ These campaigns have resonated with current students because they not only have a clear goal in mind, but they also allow students the opportunity to help their peers. Any student has the chance to design a project and start a campaign. Suddenly, possibilities seem endless and there are no limits to all that a student can create and do. They'll see the campus as a place of opportunity and unyielding support.

Meanwhile, a sense of philanthropy is being instilled in students who donate, even if they don't know it. This sentiment will stay with them long after graduation, transforming them into the engaged alumni every school needs.



QUICK TIP

Don't ask students to donate. Give them a reason to donate instead. The crowdfunding campaigns we at KDG have created are "gamified" and focus on unlocking prizes and rewards, such as fun videos and trivia facts. We make sure that no crowdfunding campaign is saying "Pay it back." Instead, we want our campaigns to say "Join us in the fun."

CREATE A CULTURE OF GIVING

Creating a culture of giving on campus is a sure way to increase engagement from both current students and alumni.⁹ However, this engagement doesn't always have to come in monetary form.

- Having regular fundraisers on campus, for clubs, classes, or different charities, will increase students' awareness of philanthropy and giving back.
- Current students don't usually have the extra funds to donate to schools, which is why seeking material donations is important. Clothing drives, canned food drives, and book drives for your area's needy are just as beneficial as monetary donations when it comes to creating a culture of giving.
- In order for a culture of giving to be effective, it has to be a true cultural event. Get faculty, alumni, and administrators to participate alongside students. Make philanthropy and fundraising a team effort. Let alumni see how active your students are and let students see how active your alumni are.

SOME OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

We know that you've worked in higher ed long enough to know the ins and outs of engagement and how to do it best. However, we still wanted to take the time to share with you some strategies we have found work well when it comes to engaging current students.

- **Student Ambassador Programs** - These programs not only let current students connect, but they are also an effective, yet relatively inexpensive, means of marketing. They are comprised entirely of willing volunteers and their presence at both alumni events and prospect open houses makes them more visible and accessible to core audiences than perhaps traditional marketing materials and methods are.¹⁰
- **Off (and On) Campus Outings** - When a student has a positive experience through the college or university, that memorable event and the college become interconnected forever.¹¹ Run outings to sporting events, schedule field trips to museums or theatres, or even host concerts and guest speakers right on campus. Tie these events into the school's curriculum or its yearly theme so that the students are learning in an environment outside of the classroom.
- **Job Shadowing Programs** - Programs such as these are especially helpful to at-risk or disengaged students. The job market is unpredictable, leaving many students with feelings of uncertainty and negativity. However, a job shadowing experience (especially with an alum as its host) can show them the possibilities that lay ahead. These opportunities demonstrate just how important a degree is and they align students with all of the viable pathways connecting their education and their potential careers.¹² With many students worried about whether they'll find a job after graduation, it's important that you show them the opportunities available.

HOW REACHBRIGHT AND KDG CAN HELP

“They [KDG] were right there with us providing advice and perspective every step of the way.”

-MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

[ReachBright](#) is the first and only tool that combines both marketing data with operational data to facilitate greater engagement for prospective students, current students, and alumni. By combining data from campus visits, donations, email engagement, event attendance, and social media interactivity, ReachBright helps leading institutions market more effectively and drive better engagement through the use of big data. Whether you want your institution to increase its enrollment efforts, engage more of its current students, or develop stronger alumni relations, ReachBright has the tools you will need.

REACHBRIGHT CAN:

- **Track** users' interests based on web-browsing and engagement activity and automatically market to them based on those interests.
- **Identify** key areas of your website that foster greater engagement for prospective students and alumni alike.
- **Record** donor history and always know who your most generous alums are.
- **Assign** tags to get a better idea of prospects' interests.
- **Create** customized reports on engagement, email activity, and web activity.

To see the power of ReachBright for yourself, we invite you to take a [self-guided demo](#) of the application.

Developed by KDG, a company that has over 15 years of experience helping higher educational institutions improve their engagement through innovative web development and design, ReachBright is the only marketing tool of its kind. Learn more at: <http://kyledavidgroup.com/> ↗

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