



WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER YOUR COLLEGE

One of the great pleasures in life is watching the new wing on the student union building take shape with your name etched in the stone cornice above the entryway. You know that generations of students will benefit from your generosity. Other satisfying ways to contribute to your alma mater are establishing a professorship or donating an electron microscope.

That time will come. For the present, you're probably more concerned with monthly expenses than architectural drawings of your legacy. However, every philanthropist starts somewhere; what matters is not the size of the contribution or the form it takes, but the very act of contributing.

Recent graduates may be shocked by how soon solicitations show up from their college alumni association. The cap and gown are barely put away when the first brochure appears in the mailbox. Or the friendly voice sounds on the telephone: "Hello, Ms. So-and-so? This is Sophie from Your University." After you realize the student representative is really calling for you and not your mother, the shock kicks in: This is my new world. Adult. Alum. Pledge drives.

But then you realize it's not about giving in to or dodging from work-study students. It's about staying connected with your college and shaping its future. You know how you benefit from maintaining contact (see Chapter 15); here are some ways you can give back to the college community, and only a couple of them relate to money.

Maintaining contact

We outlined some of the perks of staying in touch with your college and alumni association in the previous chapter. Your college benefits from this continued relationship, too. First, even your basic personal information and updates can add to the larger statistical picture that informs program direction and funding: Who graduates from which department, what they do post-graduation, how they apply their degree to their lives outside of school, etc. Also, and more importantly, your continued involvement builds on the network that supports current and former students as well as school departments and programs. You rely on the network and the network relies on you.

What's the best way to stay in contact? Well, the simplest way is by filling out and sending back the occasional forms that ask for your most recent information. Another easy way is to join the local alumni club/chapter and commit to attending a few events a year. If you want to be more involved, consider volunteering for your college or alumni association.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a powerful way to stay connected to your college: You get the pleasure of sharing your skills and expertise, and the beneficiaries of your efforts get the assistance they need and will someday pass it on to others. Mentor programs vary in structure and size from college to college, but they all focus on connecting experienced professionals with up-and-coming professionals. Once you feel established in your career, think about the guidance you had (or would like to have had) as a student. Then, volunteer in a capacity that fits your knowledge and, of course, schedule. You might meet one-on-one with a student to discuss new research and opportunities in your shared field of study or you could assist students by providing informational interviews. Another helpful service you might offer is critiquing resumes and cover letters. If you're interested in career coaching, some alumni associations offer mentors training in how to help guide students in that area.

Alumni Mentors...

- Share their knowledge and expertise
- Offer guidance with internship opportunities and job searches
- Provide informational interviews
- Help connect students with professional organizations
- Give students on-the-job experience
- Coach students on interview and presentation skills
- Speak to large or small groups at high schools or other organizations about the college



GOOD TO
KNOW

Mentoring is a rewarding and flexible method of contributing to your college community. If you have an hour a week you can take part in an on-line Q and A or offer advice on a career search message board. If you have more time you can take on a larger role in the alumni network. The results of your energies won't be written in stone on the new student union building, but they will be just as long-lasting.

Volunteer work

Are you itching to do something meaningful outside of your job? There comes a point in most people's careers when they're satisfied with the work they're doing but just need to add a little more to the greater community. If you fit this profile, consider contributing time to your college. As with mentoring, the extent of your involvement is up to you: Have an afternoon? Help out with the annual fund drive. Have a day? Help out at the new student orientation. Have grant-writing experience? Well, there's no end to the ways your school could put that to work.

Geography is not an issue, either. Even if you live far from your alma mater you can help out with recruitment or other efforts not tied to campus. Consider serving on the alumni association board of directors, for instance, or serving in a leadership position for your regional council/chapter.

Financial support

So far we've gone over some of the ways you can support your college family. Now let's talk about how you can give financial support even as you're starting your career. We'll call it "philanthropy on a budget."

First, look to the easy ways to make frequent, smaller gifts to your alma mater. Some schools are affiliated with phone plans and credit cards that give a percentage of each expense to the institution. These plans might work for you, though it's important to do the math and see if you could save more by using another credit card but maybe put part of those saved dollars toward an annual gift to your alumni association. Other minor expenses include things like paying annual alumni dues (not all schools have dues) and purchasing school-related license plates.

If you have more to give, whether it's \$10 or \$100 or \$1,000 or more, you have a few options for how to give. These include:

Designated gifts: You direct your gift to the department or program of your choosing.

Unrestricted gifts: You let the school—administration, department heads, or alumni association—decide the best use of your gift.

Matching gifts: Before you contribute, ask your human resources department if your company matches gifts. This is a great way to leverage your contributions.

Good To Know

Where does the money go?

- Teaching and learning programs
- Student research support
- Scholarships and grants
- Recruitment efforts
- Orientation programs
- Chairs and professorships
- Facility and technology upgrades

Why contribute?

Consider This ...

- You want up-and-coming students to have the same opportunities you had.
- Your gift has exponential potential. A strong base support builds on itself—colleges that can demonstrate they are already well-supported are more likely to secure even bigger contributions and grants.
- As your college and its reputation grows, so does the value of your degree.

Whatever you do, remember to keep your receipts so you can take advantage of all eligible tax deductions.

You'll find that there are many perks associated with giving back to your college family. From free sporting event tickets to access to college-owned housing around the world, your alumni association has come up with clever ways to keep you engaged and involved with your alma mater. And, you may even get tax deductions or more visibility, which can be very helpful if, say, you're an independent agent. When you stay connected you win and the college community—present and future—wins.