Alumni Network Dynamics
Creating and Sustaining ECA Alumni Networks

BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

VIRGINIA TECH

Marc Hoppler, Annika Klingen, Andrew Maloney, Angela Orange, Olivia Pope, Allie Schleifer, Melinda Yeboah

Virginia Tech Washington Semester in Global Engagement (December 2020)

Acknowledgements

The Virginia Tech Washington Semester in Global Engagement students would like to thank the faculty and staff of the WSGE program for their guidance, support, and wisdom, especially Ambassador Joyce Barr, Professor Joel Peters, and Nareg Seferian.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Virginia Tech Washington Semester in Global Engagement students were assigned to research various factors in creating alumni networks and its sustainability for the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Our research focused on three areas: a literature review of alumni networks, interviews and surveys of exchange program alumni, and comparing State Department practices with those of the United Kingdom. We reviewed literature that assessed the successes and shortcomings of existing alumni networks from universities, professions and exchange programs. Interviews were conducted of Mandela Washington Fellowship (MWF) alumni and questionnaires were sent to Friends of Fulbright Argentina alumni, all of whom participated in Virginia Tech cohorts in 2019 or 2020. Our research revealed several challenges in alumni network sustainability with solutions addressed in our four recommendations. The recommendations will allow the ECA to effectively and efficiently administer exchange program alumni networks.

1. The State Department should proactively spur the engagement of participants so that they establish ties to the network and community before they become alumni.

2. Increased embassy involvement and support is needed to propel foreign policy goals and formalize an alumni network.

3. Modernize all platforms and build a digital community to achieve the ultimate goal of engaging all alumni in the network.

4. Develop performance indicators to track tangible results of investment in alumni programs and organizations.

Literature Review

The literature review assesses the elements that constitute a successful alumni network and explores the factors that undermine it. The intention is to guide ECA towards best alumni engagement practices and reveal some external challenges that the department may face. Research shows that there is a high likelihood that U.S.-based exchange alumni will often become a member of an alumni association for a multitude of reasons such as professional gain, community advancement, or a sense of belonging.[1]

Sources have linked international higher education to changing societal systems in low- and middle-income countries, and note that higher education is viewed as a common good for societies.[2] Additionally, a common end-goal also plays an important role in facilitating engagement and collaboration between alumni. This common goal often serves as the opportunity for social and civil accomplishments that support the betterment of alumni local communities, and proves to be a strong motivational factor in network engagement. For example, the International Fellows Program Alumni Association of Ghana (IFPAAG) was founded by alumni of the Ford Foundation's International Fellows Program. These were selected scholars from marginalized communities that demonstrated academic excellence and leadership potential but had few opportunities for higher education. The IFPAAG hosts regular seminars and facilitates communication between alumni via the WhatsApp platform, and other electronic communication to send personal and professional updates. Currently, the IFPAAG is focusing its efforts to promote social justice in Ghana by providing a forum through which alumni support

---

[1] Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Rikers, R.M.J.P. *et al.* Alumni loyalty drivers in higher education. *Soc Psychol Educ* 22, 607–627 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-019-09488-4

[2] Campbell, Anne C, and Aryn R Baxter. "Exploring the Attributes and Practices of Alumni Associations That Advance Social Change." *International Journal of Educational Development* 66 (2019): 164–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.10.003.

each other's social change projects, raise awareness and attention on specific social issues, and build skills and knowledge among members. Similarly, the Mongolian Association of State Alumni (MASA), founded in 2007, is an example of another organization created by alumni of the U.S. Fulbright Program. MASA works in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Ulaanbaatar to coordinate meetings to discuss various projects, U.S. Embassy events, and a collective social change project. The ultimate goal of the alumni organization is to share the knowledge gained while abroad and to encourage others to apply for U.S. government scholarships.[3]

However, there is no guarantee that alumni will become active members of an association after their program. The depths to which students are engaged during their exchanges can impact how they participate as alumni and their overall view of the program.[4] Student engagement is of equal importance to the U.S. institution and the home country. A good relationship between students and faculty is critical to establishing loyal alumni, and could influence their alumni involvement. Snijders (2019) notes that, in order to build this relationship, it is necessary to start by understanding the needs of individual students and stimulate and reward students' active commitment. One of the best practices to engage students while in the program is through social media. Not only does social media lead to an increase in collaboration, but it also influences the formation of social identities among exchange students. It has become a critical component of student success and the main platform for the formation and maintenance of networks.[5] Others conclude that because of the different time zones and locations, membership and participation in

---

[3] Ibid.

[4] Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Rikers, R.M.J.P. *et al.* Alumni loyalty drivers in higher education. *Soc Psychol Educ* 22, 607–627 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-019-09488-4

[5] Fujita, M., Harrigan, P., and Souta, G. . International Student engagement in their university's social media. International Journal of Educational Management. Sept. 11, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-12-2016-0260

an online social networking site, like Facebook, is a better platform for alumni to stay connected

and explore common interests. Results of a study conducted by Farrow and Yuan, among twelve

university alumni, showed that "membership in an online social network associated with a

preexisting offline network leads to increases in the frequency of communication on and

offline".[6] Additionally, the impact and observation of social behaviors, such as the bandwagon

effect, play a more active role on social networking sites. Researchers compared this to the

effectiveness of an email platform, where users reported that "information is pushed out to

audience members from a single author", and therefore does not offer the same benefits of

communication among members.[7] Not only is social media a key player in creating a common

identity while in the program, but it is a crucial tool for effective communication once they

become alumni. Once a network is established, the next step is to determine how to provide the

network with the tools it will need to effectively communicate and work together.

     When examining successful alumni networks and available tools, we see multiple

services uniquely adapted to these alumni groups such as social media platforms, web portals,

and websites that serve to connect them. A study conducted at Portland State University (PSU)

explores how online platforms and other tools can encourage and increase engagement in alumni

networks. In this study, PSU developed the Continuing Engagement Program (CEP), a set of

initiatives designed to stimulate and increase alumni engagement to focus on establishing the

engagement while the prospective alumni are still at the university. CEP instituted several

programs: the Communities of Practice which assembled students and alumni with similar goals

and allowed them to collaborate while working towards those goals, and a two-credit seminar

---

[6] Farrow, H., Yuan, C. "Building stronger ties with alumni through Facebook to increase volunteerism and charitable giving". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 16, Issue 3, 1 April 2011, Pages 445–464, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01550.x

[7] Ibid.

which aided in strengthening student's skills in collaborative, community-based work environments.[8]

PSU successfully assessed the needs of an alumni network and implemented the necessary tools while they were still at the university. Initiative results were highly effective; "this program initiative yielded high engagement from students and alumni alike".[9] This study emphasizes the need for program-specific tools to effectively engage collaboration and networking between alumni, thus ensuring optimal success. Another case study conducted at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) further explored tools needed to ensure dynamic alumni networks. In its study, UJ used quantitative empirical research methodology with voluntary participants, to distribute 10,380 questionnaires during graduation. These questionnaires pertained to how active UJ alumni were online, what platforms they normally used, and what access they needed for certain activities. The results revealed that the majority of UJ Alumni wanted access to career opportunities (75.6%), and postgraduate scholarships (74%). Others demonstrated interest in current projects at the institution (58.6%), alumni achievements (53.4%), general campus activities (52.2%), cultural activities (50.2%), fundraising projects (38.4%), and sports activities (33.3%).[10] These case study results demonstrate that an online web portal can be effectively assessed to provide alumni members with the unique resources they need to engage and communicate with the platform and each other. The study shows that this empirical research tactic can be applied universally to assess the needs of specific alumni associations and effectively provide them with the necessary tools via web portal technology.

---

[8] Osborn, David, Jennifer Alkezweeny, and Kevin Kecskes. "Beyond the University: An Initiative for Continuing Engagement among Alumni." *Metropolitan Universities* 26, no. 3 (2015): 171–87.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Barnard, Z. and Rensleigh, C. (2008), "Investigating online community portals for enhanced alumni networking", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 433-445. https://doi.org/10.1108/02640470810893710

Despite millions of U.S. exchange program alumni, the challenge of engaging every alum to participate in the network remains. Alumni in Moldova admitted in an interview to "rarely engaging in the international networking opportunities hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Moldova".[11] Interviewees cited the difficulty in mobilizing to create a vibrant and cohesive network. A shift in organizational leadership from the U.S. government at the top, to a local alumni-led effort would help to mobilize these networks.[12] However, the societal context within Moldova and other countries plays a role in the below-average participation in alumni networks. Not only does the low return rate (<40%) of alumni to their home country impact networking, but Moldova also made the transition towards a more open and progressive society later than other countries in the region. This fostered an environment where alumni felt their home country was not welcoming of their new ideas and knowledge.[13] This issue is not unique to Moldova. Alumni in China stated the "excessive administrative interference and irrational evaluation criteria prevailing in its institutions of higher learning" was a key factor in undermining the collective identity among Fulbright alumni.[14] Even though alumni expressed appreciation for the U.S. Embassy's commitment to creating an engaging network through various activities, participation is moderately low.

The literature research reveals that alumni associations should utilize web portal technology, social media platforms as well as implement tools unique to alumni groups to ensure engagement and successful networking. The proper utilization of these tools will help combat the

---

[11]Campbell, A. (2016). International scholarship graduates influencing social and economic development at home: The role of alumni networks in Georgia and Moldova. Current Issues in Comparative Education, 19(1), pp. 76–91.
[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14] Aw, F. "The International Student Question: 45 Years Later." *Journal of College Admission*, no. 214, 2012, p. 10. *Gale OneFile: Educator's Reference Complete*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A325334226/PROF?u=viva_vpi&sid=PROF&xid=09471a6b

challenges of the alumni non-return rate, as well as fill in the leadership vacuum of alumni networks from inside the organization without the need for U.S. embassy involvement.

The Current State of ECA Alumni Networks

The United States began its exchange programs in 1961 to increase mutual understanding between the U.S. and other countries. This global influence gives the U.S. the unique ability to practice diplomacy, increase security, and develop relationships with other countries through exchange program alumni. Those individuals brought to the U.S. through cultural exchange programs play a significant role in U.S. foreign policy, as they develop a lasting impression of American governance and culture. Similarly, the Americans who take part in these programs diffuse their American values, ideals, and norms abroad. The multiplier effect increases the number of people impacted by the exchange programs to those well outside the initial participants.[15] The impact of these exchange programs create organic opportunities for diplomacy and soft power practices across alumni and governments. Alumni of U.S. exchange programs are an extension of U.S. soft power and allow the U.S. government to "affect others to obtain the outcomes one [the U.S.] wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment."[16]

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) was created to implement educational and cultural exchanges as a way to facilitate understanding with countries and advance United States foreign policy goals. The ECA Office of Alumni Affairs was created in 2004 to connect current and past alumni and determine the best methods to engage with them.

---

[15] Bettie, M. (2020). Exchange Diplomacy: Theory, Policy and Practice in the Fulbright Program. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy,* 16, 212-223.

[16] Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 616, 94-109.

ECA recognizes the critical role alumni play as public diplomacy officers in their home country, and created several opportunities that allow the U.S. to stay engaged with alumni, and foster global connection. Below is a list of a few resources the State Department offers for exchange program alumni.

Programs	Grants	Outreach Efforts
Alumni Thematic International Exchange (TIES) - *Speakers lead week-long sessions and create great networking opportunities for alumni*	Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AlumniEIF)- *International alumni draft a proposal to compete for grant; 3 grants of $25,000 are awarded each year*	Social media platforms Facebook- @InternationalExchangeAlumni Twitter- @ExchangeAlumni LinkedIn- @ExchangeAlumni
Career Connections- *A professional development program for U.S. citizens designed to connect alumni with meaningful jobs*	Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund- *US-based alumni grant that awards up to $10,000 each year*	International Exchange Alumni website (IEA)- *The IEA website is a key resource for alumni to access these opportunities, gain professional development resources, network with fellow alumni, and advance efforts in their community, and the world*

Although the ECA has created many ways for alumni to become involved, a representative from the ECA noted that a "siloed approach to information sharing" is the main problem the bureau faces and it greatly hinders alumni engagement. The unstandardized approach to worldwide alumni engagement is an obstacle for the bureau to overcome. Recently, the Office of Alumni Affairs distributed a worldwide alumni survey to receive feedback on the department's shortcomings in engagement, and revamp how its alumni portal operates. Key challenges noted in the survey, as well as challenges the ECA recognizes due to the variations between exchange programs are listed in the chart below.

Survey Challenges	Challenges Recognized by ECA
Alumni were unaware that they were part of a formal "alumni network"	Discrepancies in program size and funding
Alumni were unaware of the role that the U.S. State Department played in their program	Not all programs include a strong platform for communicating with alumni or post-program evaluations
Problems with attrition and coordination make it difficult to obtain the information required to connect with alumni	Alumni engagement activities are left up to the discretion of different U.S. embassies

A standardization of alumni networks is desired, however, each program is designed differently, and therefore it is incredibly complicated. To address some of these challenges in recent years the ECA has established a monitoring system for all exchange programs in 2018 to evaluate alumni in the long-term. This system will evaluate alumni at the three-year and five-year markers, and periodically thereafter. It is also in the process of reinvigorating its International Exchange Alumni (IEA) network, via streamlining over 1 million alumni archived records onto accessible database platforms, and redesigning the IEA website[17]

---

[17] alumni.state.gov

Primary Research

Mandela Washington Fellowship

As the flagship program of the State Department's Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI), the Mandela Washington Fellowship, established in 2014, brought together nearly 4,400 young and promising professionals from Sub-Saharan Africa for a six-week exchange program at U.S. universities. While in the U.S., fellows take part in academic courses, leadership training, and assemble for a multi-day summit in Washington D.C.[18] Due to Virginia Tech's participation in the program, we had the unique opportunity to interview 11 of the alumni from the 2019 MWF Virginia Tech cohort. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom between November 5th, 2020 and November 13th, 2020. The interviews consisted of 10 scripted questions and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix B.

The responses revealed shared benefits and needed improvements among the interviewees. First, program alumni noted that communication and connections was an unexpected benefit to having completed the program. All have stayed in contact with their Virginia Tech fellows, especially with those who share similar professions. Interviewees also revealed a strong connection between other MWF cohort alumni that reside in the same home country. The natural creation of a common identity, shared interests and goals allow alumni to collaborate on projects to better their communities. Another alumni benefit is the creation of professional connections and networks. The interviewees recognized that their role as an alumni was life-long, and therefore want to take advantage of the relationships with the State Department, professionals and academics in the U.S. For example, one alumni was able to capitalize on a professional connection made during his time in the U.S. with the CEO of the

---

[18] Mandela Washington Fellowship. (2020, November 16). https://www.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org/

Literacy Lab.[19] This connection helped to build a literacy center in Malawi, benefiting the fellow's non-profit children's literacy group. This demonstrates how exchange program alumni benefit from continued networking that allows them to connect with professionals who can provide resources to better their communities.

While all alumni noted that embassy-sponsored events are a great way to network, there was a unanimous agreement that the embassies should be more committed to supporting alumni's interests. Specifically the embassies should support those who take part in non-profit organizations that promote social change in their communities. An example of appreciated support was expressed by an alumni from Benin. She is a member of the armed forces and wanted to establish English classes at military camps. The U.S. Embassy in Cotonou, which she labelled "the best embassy in Africa," fully supported the endeavor and provided her with the necessary materials.[20] Alumni felt that proactive embassy involvement, such as regular meetings and more frequent events, would boost communication and network engagement. Interviews also showed that there was little to no engagement with the State Department alumni portal, as it lacked opportunities and connections to their fields of interest.

Finally, the COVID-19 Pandemic has undoubtedly transformed how the world can network and engage with each other. In particular, it has affected YALI alumni by "forcing African alumni, who are very close knit, to divide themselves from each other" and has made it so "we no longer have those close connections".[21] Furthermore, the challenges already facing ECA alumni networks pre-COVID (lack of standardization, unstreamlined information, etc.) were exacerbated by this pandemic, and some alumni wish the embassies offered more support.

---

[19] https://theliteracylab.org
[20] Raina Assa. Personal communication, via Zoom. Nov 11 2020.
[21] Victor Mwaka. Personal communication, via Zoom. Nov 13 2020.

However, not all is lost due to the pandemic. The creation of new virtual networking events and parties hosted by U.S. Embassies and other networks allow the engagement of a broader base of alumni. While the majority of fellows prefer in-person events to online meetings due to the opportunity for organic connections and better networking, virtual meetings have made the network more accessible. Through virtual platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp, alumni have been able to connect with other alumni more frequently and flexibly, albeit, in a less formal setting.
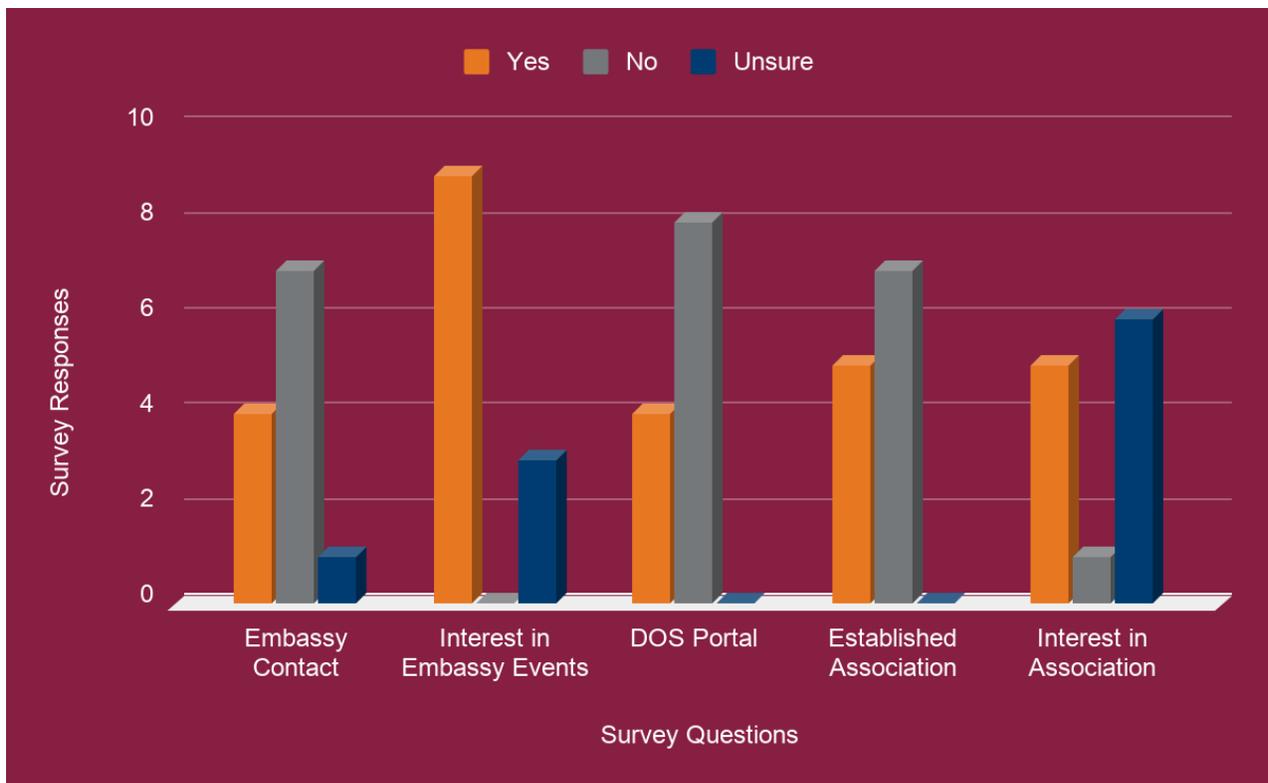
Friends of Fulbright Argentina

To better understand the dimensions of a new exchange program's alumni network, we distributed a survey to alumni of the Friends of Fulbright Argentina program, currently in its fourth year at Virginia Tech. The alumni of the program are college students or recent college graduates who studied at Virginia Tech. While in the U.S., they audited classes in their respective fields of study, attended English classes, engaged with the students and community of Blacksburg, VA, and traveled to Washington D.C. and New York.[22] The surveys allowed us to examine the networkings of a smaller exchange program, in contrast to a larger, more established exchange program such as the YALI program, as well as understand the views and attitudes of younger exchange alumni. The survey was distributed to 13 program alumni and we received 12 responses. The survey itself was administered through Google Forms, and included 21 questions encompassing four main areas of interest: background information; reasons and methods for communication among program alumni; embassy and State Department interaction; and the current and desired alumni networks. The full survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

---

[22] Friends of Fulbright Argentina. *Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute*. https://lci.vt.edu/global-initiatives/Argentina.html

Figure 1 displays the responses to what we believe are the five most important and applicable questions on the survey:

1. Has the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires contacted you since you returned?

2. Would you be open to taking part in U.S. Embassy-sponsored events?

3. Have you accessed the State Department alumni portal?

4. Do you have an established alumni association?

5. Would you be interested in joining an alumni association?

[Figure 1] - Friends of Fulbright Argentina Reponses

These questions provided the most direct feedback as to how the State Department could best improve its alumni networks. The chart reveals that while only a few of the alumni have been contacted by the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires since returning from the exchange program, the majority of them are eager to interact with the embassy and participate in embassy-

sponsored events. As with the MWF fellows, very few of the alumni have accessed the State Department alumni portal. Those respondents who did access the State Department portal were interested in alumni events, grants and scholarships, however, one respondent stated that the website was "a little bit rough" and that he could not find the information he was looking for.[23] When asked if they were already members of an alumni association, more than half of the respondents stated they were not. In spite of that all but one of the respondents indicated they have at least some interest in joining one. And, when asked to describe what those associations would look like, the respondents often stated that they would want to use the association to capitalize on the relationships they made as a result of the program and as a result of desired interaction with the embassy. One respondent bluntly stated that the main goal of the network should be to "foster people to take action on studying/working/doing business with the U.S."[24]

With respect to the other survey questions, all respondents still maintain contact with their fellow alumni and the majority of the cohorts and staff members they encountered during the exchange, while 11 of the 12 said they still communicate with Virginia Tech staff. In contrast with the MWF alumni, who often communicated due to similar professional goals and interests, the most cited reason for communication for the Friends of Fulbright alumni was friendship and similar educational interests. When asked what their role as an alumni is, in one form or another, every respondent said they wanted to share their experiences with others and motivate their fellow Argentinians to pursue U.S. exchange programs, essentially acting as recruiters. This highlights an indispensable asset that the State Department can take advantage of to grow their exchange programs, as well as increase U.S. soft power and influence. Lastly, respondents noted

---

[23] Lautaro Lorenzen. "Friends of Fulbright Argentina Survey," Google Forms Survey. Nov 14 2020. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DntZ2Su0lsvoMCN5JgQZFocQMdVVdhcqOmJJFndH9Zk/edit.
[24] Augustin Figueroa Nazar. "Friends of Fulbright Argentina Survey," Google Forms Survey. Nov 14 2020. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DntZ2Su0lsvoMCN5JgQZFocQMdVVdhcqOmJJFndH9Zk/edit.

that they would prefer an exchange program with a built-in network, as it would greatly improve their networking capabilities with professionals in Argentina, the U.S., as well as with alumni from other cohorts. The alumni, many of which want to pursue advanced degrees, want to exploit these relationships and connections to further their education in the U.S. In short, as a young program with young alumni, they offer decades of networking and communication that could be integral to growing the program in the coming years.

Country Comparison

To grasp the full potential of the exchange programs, we expanded the scope of research to a multinational lens by comparing the ECA equivalent to that in the United Kingdom (U.K.) to understand what methods of evaluation could be applicable to the United States. Given that American-run exchange programs are focused on how to best benefit the soft power of the U.S., a lens-change offers an opportunity to approach conclusions from a different perspective. For these comparisons, we looked specifically at exchange program evaluations from the United Kingdom.

In the United Kingdom the organization most comparable to the ECA is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The FCO works alongside the British Council to facilitate exchange opportunities in the U.K. The British Council was created by the U.K. government, it is an independent entity that acts as a catalyst to improve the FCO's current structure. The purpose of the British Council is to "build connections, understanding, and trust between people in the U.K. and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language."[25] They do this at the individual level and the conglomerate level by partnering with other countries and NGOs. Since the British Council is a public entity, private stakeholders want assurance that they are investing in worthwhile programs. Due to private involvement, the U.K. has created a more rigorous and thorough evaluation of their exchange programs. For example, the FCO wants to be directly involved with improving the educational programs in Ukraine in order to expand its European footprint. Therefore, the FCO is working to facilitate networks between Ukrainian universities and U.K. universities through the embassies to offer government support for initiatives. Greater cohesion and alignment with embassies both at home and abroad will lead to

---

[25] Wright, M. "British Council Tailored Review 2019," 5.

a more dynamic network because there is a formal structure to connect the participants. It also allows for the observation of network systems and offers more resources to participants, while simultaneously wielding soft power influences, both of which are objectives of the ECA.

A modern aspect of the FCO is the standardized tracking system that ensures the networks and outcomes of the exchange programs are beneficial to stakeholders. To accomplish this, the FCO tracks the return on investment through surveys of participants and those with continued connections to the program. This model of fund tracking would yield positive results for the ECA because it would ensure the appropriate use of funds.

Currently, the U.K. has programs most similar to those within the ECA and public access to information about how they evaluate the success of their programs, however other countries such as France, China, Germany and India could also be looked at for further evaluation. It would be advantageous for the ECA to invest more resources into more quantitative evaluations to ensure stakeholders that the exchange programs are accomplishing their intended purposes.

Recommendations

As emphasized by case studies and program comparisons, a number of initiatives can be incorporated into exchange programs to achieve more successful and engaged alumni networks. Below are specific recommendations that can be implemented to address the challenges discussed in the report.

Recommendation 1:

The State Department should proactively spur the engagement of participants so that they establish ties to the network and community before they become alumni.

- The ECA should create a standardized system for network creation of all exchange programs. This formalized network and support would greatly benefit the Friends of Fulbright Argentina program, and other newer programs.
- A shift in organizational leadership from the U.S. government at the top, to a local alumni-led effort would help to mobilize these networks.
- Consider creating directors of engagement to facilitate interest-specific connections.
  - Example: professional development interests would benefit from more formal modes of communication and networking via U.S. embassy-sponsored events. In contrast, local grassroot projects or the creation of more personal connections would benefit from more frequent informal modes of communication and networking events.

Recommendation 2:

More embassy involvement and support is needed to accomplish foreign policy goals and formalize an alumni network path.

- Additional support for the interests, goals, and programs of the alumni will advance social change efforts within the community.

- The ECA should implement career or educational fairs for the alumni to attend that will allow them to network with American businesses, non-profits, and universities.

- Embassies should better engage in forming and facilitating alumni events.

Recommendation 3:

Modernize all platforms and build a digital community to achieve the ultimate goal of engaging all alumni in the network.

- Update the online State Department Portal to make it more accessible for alumni.
  - Make opportunities for funding and support more readily available
  - Make connections and networking more easily facilitated through the site

- The State Department and U.S. embassies should deepen their knowledge of how social media platforms are used to further promote and engage in alumni activities.

- ECA should find new innovative ways to reach its audience, such as podcasts to illuminate alumni success stories.

Recommendation 4:

Develop performance indicators to track tangible results of investment in alumni programs and organizations.

- Administer surveys when improvements are implemented to receive quick feedback.
  - Track the return on investment through periodic surveys of participants and those with continued connections to the program.

Appendix A: Literature review sources

Aw, F. "The International Student Question: 45 Years Later." *Journal of College Admission*, no.
    214, 2012, p. 10. *Gale OneFile: Educator's Reference Complete*,
    https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A325334226/PROF?u=viva_vpi&sid=PROF&xid=09471a
    6b.

Barnard, Z. and Rensleigh, C. (2008), "Investigating online community portals for enhanced
    alumni networking", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 433-445.
    https://doi.org/10.1108/02640470810893710

Barnett, G.A., Wu, R.Y. The international student exchange network: 1970 & 1989. High Educ
    30, 353–368 (1995). https://www.jstor.org/stable/3447602

Bettie, M. (2020). Exchange Diplomacy: Theory, Policy and Practice in the Fulbright Program.
    Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 16, 212-223.

Campbell, A. "International scholarship graduates influencing social and economic
    development at home: The role of alumni networks in Georgia and Moldova. Current
     Issues in Comparative Education." (2016). 19(1), pp. 76–91.

Campbell, A., and Baxter, A., "Exploring the Attributes and Practices of Alumni
    Associations That Advance Social Change." *International Journal of Educational
    Development* 66 (2019): 164–72. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.10.003.

Campbell, A., and Mawer, M., "Clarifying Mixed Messages: International Scholarship
    Programmes in the Sustainable Development Agenda." *Higher Education Policy* 32, no.
    2 (2019): 167–84. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-017-0077-1.

Evenstar, I. "The impact of COVID on Alumni Relations in Higher Education". (July, 2020).

https://blog.unincorporated.com/alumni-relations-and-covid-19.

Farrow, H., Yuan, C. "Building stronger ties with alumni through Facebook to increase

volunteerism and charitable giving". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*,

Volume 16, Issue 3, 1 April 2011, Pages 445–464,

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01550.x

Meirong, F., and Xin, Z. "The Power of culture: Encounters between China and the US".

Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2016.

Osborn, D., Alkezweeny, J., and Kecskes, K. "Beyond the University: An Initiative for

Continuing Engagement among Alumni." *Metropolitan Universities* 26, no. 3 (2015):

171–87.

Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Rikers, R.M.J.P. *et al.* Alumni loyalty drivers in higher education. *Soc*

Psychol Educ 22, 607–627 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-019-09488-4

Appendix B: References

Friends of Fulbright Argentina. *Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute*.

https://lci.vt.edu/global-initiatives/Argentina.html

Mandela Washington Fellowship. (November 2020).

https://www.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org/

Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy*

of Political and Social Science, 616, 94-109.

Nye, J. S., Jr. (1990). Soft Power. *Foreign Policy,* 80, 153-171.

Wright, Mat. "British Council Tailored Review 2019." The British Council, 2019.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_
data/file/785297/British_Council_Tailored_Review.pdf.

Appendix C: Mandela Washington Fellowship Interview Questions

1. Introduction - Where are you from? What do you do?

2. Out of all the people you interacted with during the exchange program, who do you communicate with the most?

    a. How often? Through what method? Goals?

3. What draws you to communicating/engaging with other alumni?

    a. Common identity? Similar interests/professions? Same nationality?

4. Are you a member of an exchange program alumni association? If yes, why'd you join?

    a. Who founded it? Just YALI or alumni from other programs?

5. Have you accessed the DOS alumni portal? If yes, why?

    a. Made any connections? What benefits did it offer?

6. What role has the U.S. embassy in your country played in your network?

    a. Events? Literature?

7. What do you believe is your role as a U.S. exchange program alumnus?

    a. As an ambassador? Distributor of ideas/information?

    b. Did being part of an exchange program change your view of the US?

8. What's keeping you an active member of your alumni network?

    a. Professional/personal reasons? Sense of belonging? Common experiences?

9. What do you hope to get out of your alumni network in the long-run?

    a. How long will you remain active?

10. How would you improve your alumni network?

    a. Different forms of communication? Different events? More structured networking? Impacts of COVID?

Appendix D: Friends of Fulbright Argentina Survey Questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you attend university and what do you study? What do you hope to do after graduating/what do you do if you've already graduated?
3. Of all the people you met during the exchange program, who do you still communicate with?
   a. Other Alumni
   b. Virginia Tech Staff
   c. Professionals/Officials
   d. Other
4. From the above group, who do you communicate with the most?
5. What is/are the main reason(s) you communicate with your fellow alumni?
   a. Common Identity
   b. Similar interests
   c. Friendship
   d. Professional Interests
   e. Educational Interests
   f. Other
6. How long do you see yourself communicating with your fellow alumni?
   a. Less Than 1 Year
   b. 1-5 Years
   c. 5-15 Years
   d. Rest of Your Life
   e. Not At All
7. How soon after you returned home from the program were you contacted by a U.S. State Department employee?
   a. Within 1 Week
   b. Within 1 Month
   c. Within 6 Months
   d. After More Than 6 Months
   e. I Haven't Been Contacted
8. Has the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires contacted you since you returned?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
9. If the embassy has contacted you, please explain how often they did and for what purposes.
10. Would you be open to taking part in U.S. Embassy-sponsored events?
    a. Yes
    b. No

     c. Unsure

11. If you are interested in embassy-sponsored events, what type of events would you like to attend and what would you like to get out of them?

12. Have you accessed the U.S. Department of State alumni portal?
     a. Yes
     b. No
     c. Unsure

13. If you have accessed the portal, how often and for what purposes?

14. What do you believe your role in Argentina is as a U.S. State Department exchange program alumni?

15. Do you have an established alumni network?
     a. Yes
     b. No

16. Are you satisfied with it?
     a. Yes
     b. No

17. Would you have preferred the exchange program to have a built-in alumni network?
     a. Yes
     b. No
     c. Unsure

18. If you'd like a built-in network, why?

19. Would you be interested in joining an alumni association?
     a. Yes
     b. No
     c. Unsure

20. If you are interested, please explain the structure of the network (meetings, communications, goals, etc.).

21. Is there anything else you would like us to know?