

Conceptualizing Alumni Engagement: Exploring The Attributes and Practices of Alumni Associations to Help Student Success

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Abstract. This study explores how the attributes and practices of alumni associations help students succeed in entering the workforce. The knowledge gained by students in higher education is not always relevant to the world of work or the field. Several differences make students need to get actual knowledge that occurs in the world of work or the field. To achieve this, alumni support is needed as a higher education investment and to share their experiences with students. Universities need to provide facilities for students to discuss with alumni about work experiences gained so that students can prepare themselves for the world of work. Data were collected using interviews with department heads, and several alumni and students who had been involved in these activities. This study resulted in a model for the involvement of alumni at the "X" College, to support the success of students in entering the world of work. This program creates a positive impact on higher education institutions, students, and even alumni. Evaluation from alumni is highly expected as a measure of the success of the program and the sustainability of existing programs. With good relations between universities and alumni, the sustainability of the program for students can be carried out continuously. With the implementation of this alumni involvement model, it is hoped that it can maximize the participation of alumni in the "X" College.

Keywords: Alumni Engagement, Mentoring, Employability, Accounting Alumni

1 Introduction

In the era of the technology 4.0, by the advance of knowledge and technology development, school and university need to facilitate a relevant program for the students [1]. In the world of education, students are given theories to be applied in the world of work. During their study period, their participation in class, tutorial, and discussion is extremely practiced and emphasized. Every student is required to participate in oral presentation to present the result of their project [1]. However, the experience gained by each student is different to the workers. The practice done by the students is different from the experience gained by the workers. It is limited to illustration or representation of the world of work [2]. Education is the process to develop civilized human character. In the world of education, the students get not only the knowledge, but also develop their skills and ability. Therefore, quality management is needed. Quality management is done to make sure that the learning

process is done very well, so it produces expected *output* [3]. In creating a good education quality, we need high quality education, the role of higher education institution, and the role of alumni [4]. Alumni are image of a college. In alumni reunion, a number of parties are involved; they are lecturer, alumni, and the students.

Alumni play a great role for the students as well as the institution. In some decades, financial contribution is one of common alumni involvement [5]. Donation, funds for the development of the college and also scholarship are kinds of financial support from the alumni. Moreover, the feedback, career development and the success story of the alumni are also kinds of social support for the college [6]. In the development, alumni can introduce the university through various activities whether in the college as well as outside the college [5]. Basically, alumni will always make a good relationship with the institution. Good communication will play a great role for the alumni for the development of the institution, such as curriculum development.

Curriculum is designed as guidelines for learning implementation, including in higher education level [7]. However, curriculum has to be developed and adjusted towards the student's needs. The policy of education curriculum is always regulated by the government. However, the curriculum development in the college can be regulated by the college by following the guidelines of SNPT, KKNi and MBKM according to the characteristic of the college. Curriculum development can be done by seeing the alumni records. Alumni play a great role in the curriculum development, as evaluation, support of the quality of the study program, to keep the quality of the study program [8].

Alumni role as an evaluator of the learning process will be able to give feedback for the better learning quality, alumni competence become the assessment for the external party toward the study program. Therefore, alumni keep the quality of the study program [8]. Alumni also play important role in giving feedback towards the process and improvement for the institution. Alumni become the target in developing and improving the quality of the education system in the college. Alumni are asset of the education institution as an image of the institution. Therefore, institution has responsibility to create qualified and competitive alumni. The *Feedback* from the Alumni is an evaluation for the advance of the college to improve learning process, curriculum, course content, as well as the quality of the lecturer [9].

Alumni play a great role in developing students' knowledge in the field. Alumni can give suggestions for the problems in the world of work. So, the students have enough knowledge and good preparation for the world of work. Therefore, the students need to discuss with the alumni to share the alumni experience [10]. Alumni contribution in communication with the alma mater is very useful for the students' skill. Alumni participation gives positive impact for the institution, alumni, and the current students [11]. Alumni contributor for the students success by giving the image and providing career and networking opportunities, alumni motivates the students to be involved actively in college activities and developing students' skill [12]. There are some projects that can be done; by making small groups of alumni and the students. The discussion is about the material which is given by the alumni to be practiced by the students, and the discussion related to qualification, interest, and skills needed in a world of work [2]. Through the workshop, alumni participate in giving soft-skill in developing professionalism of the students to develop the career in the world of work [13].

Soft skill and spiritual intelligence have positive and significant impact towards working readiness of the accounting students. Based on that, alumni indirectly play role in building students character towards working readiness. Alumni motivate the students related to *passion* and skills in the world of work [14]. Alumni contribute in non-academic aspect related to work preparation of the students. Moreover, learning from the success story of the alumni,

their achievement as well as their attitudes will give positive impact in their career [15]. So, when the students know the achievement and the attitude of the alumni, it will motivate the students to do what they have done.

As an education institution, Accounting Department in X University also considers that alumni involvement gives significant impact for the students' readiness in the world of work. Alumni experience becomes indirect learning to develop the students' character. This department has done various activities involving the alumni, such as public lecture, guest lecture, seminar and workshop. Those activities have been done by the department to involve alumni in the process of developing the quality of the future graduates. However, according to interview with the Head of the Department, the problems occurred during the activities even though it has been done for several times. The problems are the lack of time for the discussion, the difference of the goal substance and the time to conduct the program. Those problems obstruct the process alumni involvement in the activities done. So, mostly the expectation of the department related to alumni professional experience cannot be gained well.

Besides those factors, the writer believes that other problems may occur in the alumni involvement. According to that, the writer is interested to find out predicted factors as an important part in alumni development and alumni association practice in helping students' success in the world of work. Moreover, this research contributes theoretically as an additional literature for the academics; for the further research as well as related knowledge alumni contribution for the students' success in the world of work. Practically, this research gives image for the students towards the role of the alumni in the success of their career and their contribution towards the success of the students' career.

2 Method

This research is qualitative research using case study method. This study explores attribute and alumni association practice to help the students in the world of work. The aim and the question of this research determine the method [16]. Qualitative method is used to understand "why" and "how" something happens in concrete situation [17][18]. Data in this research are primary data and secondary data. Primary data was gained through semi directive interview [17] as well as observation document, location and personal notes. Primary data was gained from the interview with the Head of Accounting Department and alumni of Accounting Department in "X" University in West Java. Secondary data was gained from literature review, research result and other relevant source. In this research, informants from selected alumni were chosen with purposive sampling according to field of work related to the study program such as teacher or lecturer, tax consultant, portfolio analyst, etc. The 33 informant representative each study program; Diploma III in Accounting, Bachelor of Accounting Education, and Bachelor of Accounting Studies. Data analysis used interactive model by Miles Huberman and Saldana [19]. They are; (1) data collection; (2) data reduction; (3) data presentation; and (4) conclusion. Credibility test was done by triangulation of the data source. Data triangulation and the source allow the writer to compare and collect information as well as increasing validity towards the attributes and practice of Alumni association in helping the students.

Table 1. Data of the Informants

No	Informants	Total
1	Head of Department and Coordinator of the Study Program	3
2	Alumni of Accounting Department	15
3	Students	15
TOTAL		33

Note. Informants are chosen based on the criteria of the researcher (*random sampling*)

3 Result and Discussion

Before discussing alumni involvement in this research, we did the interview with the Informants who participated in the activities held by Accounting Department of X University in the last 2 years. This research was done through interview with the head of department and coordinator of the study program, alumni, and the students. It was done to find out the aim of the research. Credibility test in this research was done by using data triangulation. Moreover, the result of the interview can be done as guidelines in determining policy in involving alumni in the university.

In this discussion, we try to classify some results in data collection. There are six parts that will be discussed. They are:

3.1 Accounting Department Strives to Build Long term Relationship with the Alumni: The Strength of Alumni Network is on the Motivation to Develop Accounting Department

Some alumni have good relationship with the department. They have self of belonging towards the alma mater. They are highly motivated to give the best experience especially the experience that they cannot get from the college. The valuable experience that they have gotten from the college will also build a certain relationship between alumni and the university, and give impact to the loyalty of the alumni towards the alma mater [20]. Alumni mostly think that their relationship with the alma mater is a feedback, so alumni who are pleased during their study will contribute actively for the development of the alma mater [21][22]. Self of belonging of the alumni gives positive impact for the institution, such as alumni become volunteer in supporting the activities held by the institution [23].

Coordinator of the Study Program of Bachelor of Accounting Studies stated that alumni feel glad to be back in the Department even tough indirectly. Alumni hope that they can visit the Department directly in the future because department has given them experiences in their study period.

“Alumni whom I called to be the speaker for the guess lecture or other seminar related to soft skill development or the preparation for the work are always excited to help accounting department. They also pleased to share their experience during their study period” (MY)

In the other hand, the Head of the Department stated that there were some problems. Alumni who are successful are extremely busy with their work. So, it was hard to set the time. The Head of the Department also realized currently, alumni have responsibility towards the company, so they cannot leave the work easily.

“The activities that we have done in the last 2 years become an embryo to develop long term relationship with the alumni. But, we consider the lack of time of the alumni. Therefore, we arrange discussions and activities together with the students involving the alumni which were held after working hours. We minimize the problem by conducting the activities in the weekend” (MT)

The finding is in line with Enkhtur [24] who stated that Alumni are motivated to contribute for the community and institution, economic, politic, social, and law. “*People-oriented*” and “*two-way mutual win*” concept in alumni management will develop good cooperation between alumni and the alma mater, as well as between the alumni [25]. Keeping good relationship with the alumni was oriented to create harmony in the society, and care for each other so it will be beneficial for each other, for the institution as well as for the alumni. Alumni involvement is the believe from the alumni that believe towards the alma mater (personal value), alumni understanding towards the characteristic of the alma mater (integrity of the institution), the power of interest or sympathy by the common of interest towards institution (sense of connection), personal resources of what they want to invest towards the university (commitment), and their value towards the value of investment (sense of fulfilment) [26].

3.2 Giving Alumni Space for Work: establishing alumni association of accounting department formally

Accounting Department has created a special team, with the purpose to do personal approach and communicate intensively with the alumni in every study program. This team is a group of work under coordinator of each study program. Their responsibilities are: 1) Inviting the alumni to *Whatsapp Group*, after the students graduated; 2) Keeping good relationship with the alumni, such as giving information about job opportunities, scholarship, *tracer study*; 3) Connecting the communication between alumni and Accounting Department.

“We held alumni reunion, and WAG (WhatsApp Group) for the Alumni is suggestion from the alumni. They hope to stay connected with the institution; such as activities involving the alumni. For example: in conducting webinar about soft skill we can call alumni association.”
(Alumni Team)

Before Alumni created, accounting department calls the alumni through thesis supervisor. This is common phenomena, where emotional and intensity of non-formal communication make it easy to call the alumni [27]. Therefore, activity such as “Sharing with alumni”^{*)} which started to be held in 2020, in 2021 did not get any difficulties in calling the alumni to be involved in the activity. The selection of the alumni based on the profile and background of the activities held by the Department. Head of the Department admitted that it is necessary to attach alumni in Department.

“The effort done by accounting department was limited in time and pandemic condition. But, we start to consider priorities to create solid alumni association of accounting department. We hope by this alumni organization, communication between alumni and accounting department will be better. This is also a form of evaluation of learning process in accounting department. Graduate alumni who have gained experience in this department will be able to give image of points of learning process

that need to be developed.”

So far alumni organization is in university level, and connected to the website. Alumni association in department level is needed to make communication between department and alumni, as well as between alumni easier, so we can consider important decision are made faster. Alumni hope that University consider alumni point of view in arranging curriculum, so it can develop the quality of the education, co-curricular activity and curricular extra [28]. Moreover, from alumni point of view, alumni association can connect the graduate students effectively so it can open opportunity for the fresh graduates, and career guidance efficiently [29]. Alumni Association needs to be created in department level. It will give significant impact towards human resource management and provision of instructional facilities in the North Central States University, Nigeria [30].

3.3 Giving trust for the Alumni to participate in developing accounting department: To participate in students’ self-development to be ready for the world of work

As discussed before, accounting department gives opportunity for the alumni to participate in annual event; guiding students for work preparation. The program was arranged with the alumni, is an annual program which is conducted annually to alumni conveying the development of the needs of work in the world of industry. The activities are: a) Motivation to get the dream work, b) Self-Branding for a competitive world of work, c) Minimal competence to compete with other students. One of the Informants in this event stated that he enjoyed this event and glad because the department asked him to share his experience, from his experience during his study period until he achieve current position.

“I am proud to share my experience from my study period until now. I hope this activity can be conducted annually and invites other alumni. This activity can be the starting point for the students’ success. You can take my experience to take you to the better work. You can learn from my bad experience to be careful in making decision” (FD)

Alumni involvement in students’ accompanied activity supports professional development and develop students’ attitude [31]. It can support harmony in academic, professional, and the students, which can help the students in the world of work. Alumni involved in organization, financial, students fair, personal fair and facilities. This empowerment can be done by giving space for the alumni to participate in organization and leadership in the college, active in personal affair, financial and facilities distribution for the college, supports the activities and developing the network, giving survey response and attending activities conducted by the college [32].

3.4 Social Media as an Important Thing to Strengthen the Relationship with Alumni

Social media was also used by the college to be connected with the juga alumni, and to be involved in other activities in the future [31]. Instagram is one of popular social media social for its unique content, so it helps to be connected with the alumni, as well as to select potential students [33]. ND is one of the alumni who gets benefit from the information in Instagram of Alumni Association of X University. Curiosity about the information of Alumni Association which he heard in the judiciary made him to search on social media; Instagram. Information

related to the scholarship, workshop to get the scholarship is also available in IG.

“I see it from the web of alumni association, ma’am, but not really often. I got update from IG, and mostly about seminars, Ma’am. I also follow topic of scholarship, I want to continue my study. I also often get information from WhatsApp Group Alumni.” (ND)

FS did the same thing, even though he is a lecturer. Social media that is mostly used is Instagram of Alumni Association, Instagram FEB, and Instagram X University. FS feels that he get benefits from the webinar, call for paper, and connected to do collaboration of Tri dharma research as well as community service. FS appreciates alumni association, in the university level as well as in department level.

“For now, because I work as a lecturer, I try to stay connected with Tri dharma. Community service is also connected by cooperating with colleague in X University. I follow the social media, because I need information such as webinar/workshop. Plus point for X University is the space for alumni, such as seminar/webinar which can only be followed by the alumni.” (FS)

Social media is one of communication method that will change continuously, but it will be important to increase alumni participation [34]. Reactivation of social media account of accounting department is important to increase alumni involvement.

3.5 Website, developing the quality of indirect communication with the alumni

Website is one of media which connect X University with its alumni. Information in the website is complete related to job opportunities, *job fair*, webinar of career development, and the latest news related to alumni activities. The information gives chance alumni to apply in the company which cooperates with the University. *Web application* helped alumni association in tracking alumni interaction with the institution, and make personal (alumni, institution, as well as the students) to interact effectively because of communication media [35]. Website is easy to be accessed by the users with the limited device because it can be accessed from the *mobile*, and it is also interesting [36][37].

The requirement to be alumni member is also easy; by registering in the website in judiciary and pay. For the alumni who graduated in 2020 they have to register alumni association, and it is one of the requirements for the graduation. FS does not mind the fee because it is well informed as it was mentioned in the website. The fund will be used for the development of the organization and alumni, recruitment for alumni and graduate candidate, and for the scholarship for the students.

“I don’t know about alumni association... In judiciary, I was asked to pay for alumni association ... then I search on the internet. Registration menu is available, but I did not register directly, because I have been registered automatically on the graduation and I got alumni association card” (FS)

Website for alumni is beneficial for the graduate students as well as for the students to get ready for the world of work. Website for the alumni gives information about its alma mater [25]. ER suggest website of alumni association in X University to open two-way communication. ER feels difficulty in sharing the information of job opportunities.

“I suggest Q & A on the website. When I got difficulty in uploading

job opportunity, what do I have to do? I hope the graduate students of X University apply for the job.”

Alumni also involved in giving survey response and visit the college website, and attend the activities conducted by the college [32].

3.6 Discussion and Reunion of the alumni, to develop Accounting Department

One of the discussion activities with the alumni was facilitated by Accounting Department of X University; “Sharing dengan alumni”^{*)}. This activity allows the alumni to share their experience with their juniors in virtual meeting. In this occasion, alumni share their working experience to motivate the students and develop the skills needed in the world of work.

“At first, I was called by my thesis supervisor to share my experience to the students. Our communication is good. He knows where I work. Next, I was invited to WhatsApp Group alumni. I am glad to be involved” (FM)

In this discussion, the writer did the interview with the participants. They are varied from the students in the early year until the students in the final year. For the students in the final year, this activity is interesting because it helps them get information about job opportunities and motivation to develop self-efficacy of the students to be ready for the world of work [38].

“The theme was good. As a student in my final year, I need to think about my career. This webinar opens my perspective about the experience of the alumni because so far for the recruitment, mostly TOP 10 universities in Indonesia. In fact, graduate students from other universities got a chance to work with a good position. So, mindset as an accounting student is not only about accounting, journal, finance, tax, but there are fields that we can try. From my perspective, this activity is beneficial because the students get experience from alumni who have worked. And the students know who are the alumni, and the alumni know the accounting students. So, the connection between students and alumni who have worked is built indirectly.” (KA)

This activity is beneficial for the student. Not only for students in the final year, but also for the students in the first year. Alumni contribute actively in the field of non-academic for the students. Alumni need to be involved in developing the quality of the resource in the college to create better quality resource in the society [4].

“to get relation, motivates the students, to know the real condition in the world of work, and discipline about what need to be applied in the world of work.” (AN)

From the benefits of this activity, there are many students interested to communicate with the alumni. They hope they can do other activities with the alumni to get further detail related to the profession of the alumni. Further information given by the alumni related to the world of work will give long term benefit, so communication done by the students with the alumni is not limited to the activity facilitated by Accounting Department [39].

“Make more program such as mentoring with the alumni. So, the alumni will become a mentor for the student who wants to work in the

same position. They can discuss tips about skills needed for the work, such as an auditor. So, it will be more comfortable to ask and discuss the world of work. Students need mentoring from the alumni” (AS).

Alumni feel closer with the department which facilitates the relationship after graduate. Alumni even donate for the alma mater. Alumni association is a community involving the alumni, even though it is not honorarium [40]. It is in line with Dean and Jendzurski [12] who stated that alumni involvement in a program is not limited to financial contribution. Professionalism, leadership and other soft skills will encourage and motivate students' success. Moreover, another involvement to support the students' success is alumni networking that can cooperate with the university to give information about job opportunities.

4 Conclusion

Based on the discussion, the researcher program which can be conducted by accounting department to maximize alumni involvement in increasing the performance of accounting department, such as:

1. Accounting Department Build Long Term Relationship with the Alumni: The power of Alumni Networking is on the Motivation to Develop Accounting Department. Keep a good relationship with the alumni to create harmony in society, and care for each other, whether institution or alumni.
2. Determining alumni organization structure in every study program. Alumni Organization is a part of accounting department which later will contribute in giving suggestions for accounting department according to the field and experience.
3. Activities arranged with the alumni are an annual event which is held annually to facilitate alumni to convey the needs of the world of industry. The activities are: a) Motivation to get dream work b) Self-Branding for a competitive world of work, c) Minimal competence to compete with other students.
4. Accounting Department needs to activate Social Media account such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook. So, branding profile of the graduated of accounting department can be done well. Social media account also facilitates the alumni to greet each other.
5. Website to provide information about alumni organization. Recruitment of alumni volunteer, working program and evaluation can be presented in this website. By giving comprehensive information in this page, alumni are expected to be volunteers in this organization. The benefits are network for the work that helps them for self-branding and help them to brand themselves as well as their current company.
6. Discussion and reunion with the alumni to develop Accounting Department. The activity is held once every 2 years. This is to discuss the development of the World of Work and Industry which later on will be used as evaluation of Accounting Department in creating the graduates according to the needs of the era development. The feedback from the alumni will be considered to support trust alumni and accounting department. Trust will be a good start to involve alumni with the alma mater.

Alumni involvement is done by Accounting Department in X University in a varied ways. Website or social media such as Instagram, telegram, whatsapp, and facebook are used to keep

good relationship with the alumni. Website Alumni Association and social media of X University are maintained by IKA team. Next, in a smaller level, the responsible person of alumni is created by the Department, who unites alumni through Whatsapp Group.

This research resulted in program arrangement, in the department level to keep good relationship with the alumni, they are (1) arranging organizational structure, (2) arranging annual program with alumni, (3) using website as information media of alumni activities related to the world of work, (4) alumni reunion and discussion forum, (5) social media for self-branding graduate candidates, and (6) follow up responses/evaluation from the alumni. The program will support graduates profile that are ready to work in the world of work. Next, the researcher compares the strategy of the institutions or universities in keeping good communication with the alumni.

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