OU graduates are glad they attended Oglethorpe; they want the ongoing value of their diploma to be protected and enhanced by current University activities. This article outlines how the Office of Alumni Relations will shift focus on more impactful ways to intentionally engage all members of the Oglethorpe Alumni Association based on OU’s Alumni Attitude Survey of 2016.

Conducted for the Oglethorpe Alumni Association by primary investigator Shane Pruitt, Associate Director of Alumni Relations, the survey included responses from 388 alumni who filled out an online questionnaire.

The survey provides evidence of a strong base of support as well as some clear opportunities. The following major recommendations were made due to the data gleaned from respondents of this questionnaire:

- Communicate better to alumni how the OU diploma is increasing in equity (by sharing more stories to aid the perception that OU helps alums get a job or into a graduate program they desire)
- Honor the loyalty that alums have for faculty (by including these faculty members into our event programming)
- Allow alums to take part in the sharing of OU history and traditions (by better understanding how such history and traditions resonate with each generation graduating from Oglethorpe)
- Provide more opportunities for alumni to show OU pride (by offering more ways to show affiliation for the school)

If all the survey results could be boiled down to one critical point, there is a desire for alumni to see that their degree—no matter when they earned it—is appreciating in value.

The “value” of a diploma depends very much on impression or reputation. It is important for OU that its students and alumni not only continue to do good work, but also to make sure everyone knows about those accomplishments.

Of those who answered the survey, 96% said it was an “excellent” or “good” choice while only 4% said “fair” and none reported it was a “poor” decision (Fig. 1).

The survey included detailed questions aimed at providing a better idea of what shapes alumni opinion of OU. “Value and respect for degree” was the most critically important factor in shaping opinions of the University while “history, tradition”, “providing student scholarships” and “accomplishments of students” also make big impacts.
When it comes to ranking how alumni are motivated to be active as members of the Oglethorpe University Community, the most important decision hinged on the opportunity to “showing pride in OU”. Other important motivations for engagement included “staying connected at OU” and “staying connected to friends and classmates”.

Similarly, when respondents were asked to rate activities based on how important it is for alumni to be involved, the majority of alumni said it is “very” or “critically” important that they help with “serving as ambassadors to promote OU to others” and “identify job opportunities for graduates”. Alumni want to see more people outside of the Community understand the excellence of the institution. Also, alumni see the importance of lending a helping hand to help recent graduates find a satisfying career (Fig. 2).

Maintaining an active connection with alumni is critical for all colleges and universities, and Oglethorpe alumni feel that “The Flying Petrel monthly newsletter” (an online publication) is the most important communication method the University employs to share information. Interestingly, the printed word is still key to communication as “The Carillon Magazine” ranks higher in importance than institutional websites or social media as the go-to place to gain information (Fig. 3).

When asked about why alumni may have visited campus in the last 3 years, many said it was due to an alumni-specific event or for the Museum of Art. Over 20% of respondents verified they had not visited campus in that time.

Fig. 3. How important are the following OU methods of communication to you?

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<th>Method</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Flying Petrel monthly newsletter</td>
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<td>The Carillon Magazine</td>
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Some of the questions sought to discover specific loyalties. Do alumni mostly support their academic specialty or do they support OU as a whole? The answer is yes to both, meaning alumni hold strong loyalties to the areas in which they majored and to the entire university although, in a surprise finding, affections tilt toward a faculty member or instructor as strongly as these other factors. One of the University’s greatest continual strengths has been the skill of her instructors.

Robyn Furness-Fallin, the development and alumni relations vice president, thanked alumni who participated in the survey. She noted that the Alumni Relations Office plans to repeat the survey consistently, striving for new engagement, to discover progress in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses.

Do you have questions or comments?

You may contact the Office of Alumni Relations at alumni@oglethorpe.edu or 404.364.8893.