

Proposal for University Assessment Funds, 2006-07

Project Title: Developing Alumni Profiles for Assessment Purposes, Part 3

Project Leader

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A. Overview and Context

Academic program faculty are interested in understanding the experience of alumni as a source of information to inform program improvement. Deans have expressed interest in enhanced and campus-wide resources for alumni information. External agencies and interest groups -- for example legislators, accreditors, higher education critics, students and their families -- are interested in the experience of alumni as a demonstration of the “added-value” of the degree program a student completed. This is the third year we are requesting funds to expand the use of the wealth of unit record data we keep on alumni and to make use of it for assessment purposes.

A1. Relationship to the assessment plan and to accreditation: Alumni records are an under-developed source for assessment information. Most of the specialized accrediting agencies and our regional accreditor (the Higher Learning Commission of NCA) have established expectations that what our students do after they graduate is relevant to assessing student learning. They are not dissuaded by the difficulties associated with collecting information from individuals who no longer have a direct connection to our organizations nor an obligation to share information with us. We are motivated by an interest in meeting these expectations. We anticipate that progress on this project will be useful to program faculty and in the upcoming reaccreditation project in preparation for the HLC site visit in the spring of 2009.

A2. Plans for continuation and dissemination: Our intention is to establish a set of Alumni Profiles that can be updated annually and be made available to every academic program in the university.

A3. Year 1, Feasibility Study: In the first year of this project (2004-05) we focused on demonstrating the feasibility of this approach. APA and WAA worked together to share data, to explore the content and quality of the data sets, and to build a prototype Alumni Profile. The Alumni Profile was imagined as a by-major, by-level set of indicators for each academic major program. The existing Department Planning Profiles and Graduate Program Profiles are valuable to users and provide a foundation for this idea. The project was initiated in the summer following the spring announcement that all alumni data would be held by WAA, and not split between WAA and the UW-Madison Registrar’s Office. The project objectives were met. We established a strong working relationship, APA developed expertise in using the alumni data sets and succeeded in connecting the student record system and the alumni record system, and APA developed a prototype Alumni Profile. In addition Clare Huhn produced a report entitled

“Where Do UW-Madison Alumni Live” that provided an analytical perspective on this topic for the first time. (Funding level - \$23,000)

A4. Year 2, Enhancing Data Collection: In the second year of the project (2005-06) we focused on enhancing the quality of the data set. The prototype Alumni Profile showed us what information was available and also highlighted what was missing. The effort in the last year has been to fill in some of those gaps. This effort has coincided with a redevelopment of the WAA web site and the WAA directory. A report on our progress this year follows. (Funding level - \$13,800)

A5. Year 3, Institutionalizing Data Sharing: In the third year of the project (2006-07) we are requesting funds to help us build the final technological elements that will let us institutionalize our work. Details are given in section C. (Funding request - \$7,000)

B. Report on Use of the 2005-06 Assessment Fund Award

The 2004-05 project – the feasibility study – allowed us to demonstrate that the alumni record data base includes address information (~95% complete records), engagement information (WAA membership records and records of having made a financial donation to the UW Foundation, 100% complete), and employer information (~20% complete). Alumni records can be combined with the degree and demographic information held by the Registrar’s Office to answer analytical and assessment questions.

The alumni data set allows us to look at geographic distributions and engagement factors by academic program. The prototype Alumni Profile also includes the key demographic variables of gender and race/ethnicity: this is information that is available with degree data, but by combining it with the alumni data and collecting it into one data set along with the alumni-specific information it gives the alumni profile additional value and utility.

For 2005-06, we continued development of the data sources that would make the Alumni Profile possible. We envisioned enhancements to the collection of alumni data set to make it more useful for assessment.

B1. For 2005-06 we focused on three areas of enhancement:

B1a. Increasing the degree to which academic units direct their alumni to the WAA directory data collection site and decreasing the degree to which units keep these records in their own offices.

Some programs, for example Social Work, have almost 100% employer information in their department-based systems. However, there is almost none of this information in the WAA data set and is therefore unavailable for university-wide assessment purposes.

In the current environment of constrained resources the use of the WAA directory provides an opportunity for administrative efficiencies by reducing or eliminating the staff time devoted to gathering alumni addresses and redirecting the staff time to efforts where there is no redundancy. Because addresses for all alumni are collected by WAA and the UW-Foundation, no unit needs

to expend staff time on this activity. Up-to-date address information is readily available to academic units through on-line or phone requests.

APA and/or WAA staff met with several academic units to describe the value to the unit of making use of the WAA directory data system. Those units included

- College of Agricultural and Life Sciences,
- College of Letters & Science, Student Academic Services,
- College of Letters & Science, Alumni Affairs,
- School of Human Ecology,
- College of Engineering,
- School of Business (WAA only),
- School of Nursing (WAA only),
- School of Social Work (WAA only).

In addition, WAA has held additional cross-campus forums for the roll-out of their new web site and the directory collection site in an effort to describe available services more fully. As a consequence of these communication efforts several units, including the Social Work and the College of Engineering, are giving up all shadow systems and realizing efficiencies by shifting to using the WAA directory collection site and services.

To assist in these meetings with academic units we developed two communication pieces, a Project Overview paper, and a set of PowerPoint slides. Both of these documents are appended to this report.

Thus, our proposal goal of increasing the use of the WAA directory collection site has been achieved. WAA staff will continue this effort, which is enhanced by the implementation of the redesigned WAA web site.

B1b. Improving the underlying structure of how employer and employment information is collected to make it more useful for analytical purposes. Currently, alumni provide free-form entry data for occupations, which is not useful for this purpose.

The difficulties associated with free-form entry are illustrated by alumni who hold a BS Nursing degree. In the feasibility study we (Clare) had looked at the occupation information for all Nursing alumni records to test the ability to classify alumni as either employed as nurses, or not employed as nurses. Nursing was selected because it is a small school and has a small enough population of alumni that a record-by-record review is possible, as a professional program the occupations might be fairly uniform, and the occupation information was available for a substantial fraction of Nursing alumni. Based on our test, we concluded that with free-form title entry the range of titles that were entered made classification and analysis of occupation information impractical, even for a fairly homogenous group.

Our plan was to devise a pick list of occupations that could be embedded in the WAA directory site. Ideally, we would use a classification system that was used by state or federal agencies or was otherwise a standard occupation list. We reviewed several occupation classification systems. None of them were suitable for our needs. They were too long, or included too many categories that didn't apply to UW-Madison graduates, or did not align with our areas of study.

Meanwhile, in a separate project the School of Business working with the WAA had devised a list of occupations that they wanted to use a pick-list for their alumni. We concluded that a more productive approach would be to devise a list with each school and college that would serve the needs of the academic unit, for example accreditation needs, internal evaluation needs, or for other program goals.

One reason to be interested in occupation information is to evaluate if alumni are employed in an occupation that uses their UW-Madison education. This is a concept that may be more appropriately applied to professionally oriented programs than for liberal arts programs. In any case, we did not succeed in devising an occupation collection schema that would allow us to answer this question. Instead, we concluded that this question is better posed as a perception question to alumni. Addition of survey questions is discussed in the next section.

B1c. Adding a handful of high-value survey-type questions to the WAA alumni directory collection site.

By adding a small set of high-value survey questions to the WAA web site, we will collect a few key perceptions from every alumnus who visits the directory update website. We understand the limits of this approach in terms of its research value. With experience we may be able to refine the approach to make it more useful.

We reviewed several alumni surveys and asked academic units what the most important information would be to collect this way. We also discussed the choice of questions with the Assessment Council. The WAA asked us to keep the questions to a small number – no more than six. We agreed. We concluded that it would be better to have a robust set of responses for a few questions than a smattering of responses for a long list of questions.

The following questions are now integrated into the WAA directory collection web site:

1. Regardless of the financial benefits, has your UW-Madison education improved the quality of your life?

Respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is “Definitely Yes” and 1 is “Definitely No”:

Definitely Yes 5 4 3 2 1 Definitely No

2. Which one of the following best describes your current employment and educational status?

Employment:

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Caring for my family/home full-time
- Unemployed, seeking employment
- Unemployed, not seeking employment
- Other

Education:

- Enrolled in a full-time program leading to another degree
- Enrolled in a part-time program leading to another degree
- Enrolled in classes not leading to another degree
- Not presently enrolled but plan on taking further coursework or other continuing education
- Not presently enrolled and have no plans to enroll in classes or other continuing education

- Other

Asked of alumni who respond above that they are employed:

3. For your current job, how applicable is the skill set you developed at UW-Madison (verbal and written communication skills, problem solving skills, etc.)?

Respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is "Highly related" and 1 is "Not at all related":
Highly related 5 4 3 2 1 Not at all related

4. How closely related is your current job to the content of the major/field in which you received your most recent degree?

Respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is "Highly related" and 1 is "Not at all related":
Highly related 5 4 3 2 1 Not at all related

5. How well did your academic experiences at UW-Madison prepare you for your current job ?

Respond on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is "Exceptionally well" and 1 is "Not at all well":
Exceptionally well 5 4 3 2 1 Not at all well

6. For the most recent year, what was the annual income/salary of your current job?

(If working part-time, estimate your salary at a full-time rate.)

- \$30,000 or less
- \$30,000- \$59,999
- \$60,000-\$89,999
- \$90,000 or more

7. Is your current job your first full-time job after receiving your UW-Madison degree? Yes / No

Any alumnus who visits the web site and who has graduated within the previous 10 years will be invited to provide a response. We are working on a plan for evaluating when the information will become "stale". Currently we are planning to also ask alumni to update this information if they update any directory information or 2 years after they responded the previous time.

Additional sets of alumni questions were prepared for units that want to do alumni surveys and are available upon request.

B2. Additional Related Activities

In addition to the activities described above, APA completed the following activities related to using alumni data for assessment.

B2a. AIRUM Conference Presentation – Alumni Data for Program Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Jocelyn Milner and Clare Huhn, November 2005. The slides from this presentation are attached.

B2b. ACT Alumni Survey Summary. In the summer of 2005 the University of Wisconsin System Administration conducted the ACT Alumni Outcomes Survey with alumni from all UW institutions. The summary report, received by UW-Madison in October 2005, used all participating institutions as the reference group. We redid the summary using only bachelor's degree granting institutions. The revised report and a summary of key findings is posted at <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/Alumni/alumni.htm>

B3. 2005-06 Expenditure Summary

The 2005-06 proposal was funded for \$13,800 and was expended as follows: \$10,000 to WAA to support development of the web interface; \$1,800 for APA license and software for 4D, the WAA alumni record system; \$1,200 for Jocelyn and Clare to travel to a conference to present a paper on this project; \$800 for additional expenses. (Note: The 2005-06 rate for APA staff time charged to projects is \$57/hour; \$800 covered 14 hours of staff time. Jocelyn and Clare estimate a combined effort of about 120 hours on this project. Thus, the match provided by APA is about \$6,840.)

C. Proposal for 2006-07 Activities

Most of the required elements of a proposal are covered in the preceding sections. Thus, our proposal for 2005-06 is quite short and focuses on what we are proposing as activities for the coming year.

C1. WAA and APA will devise a process for the construction and sharing of the data file, especially the responses to the perception questions. Ideally, WAA does not want to store these responses with the directory information to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Building a computer system for storing the data, linking it to directory information, and efficiently sending it to APA on a routine schedule will take programming time.

C2. APA will review the data set with the newly added data elements, probably in the spring of 2007, and update the prototype Alumni Profiles. We hope to add new data elements. We will continue to work on our goal of building an Alumni Profile that is broadly useful.

C3. 2005-06 Budget Request

WAA database (4D) license and software	\$ 1,800
APA S&E	\$ 200
Programmer time - WAA	\$ 5,000
Assessment Funds Requested	\$ 7,000
APA MATCH - Staff time match, 120 hr @ \$59/hr	\$ 7,080

D. Closing Comment about Project Scope and Resources

Based on a review of the literature and discussions with institutional and academic researchers at UW-Madison and at other universities, we are unable to identify any other university that is developing a similar resource. We conclude that **we are the only large research university that envisions developing unit-record alumni data source data for assessment purposes.** We have also found over the past year, that this project is ambitious in scope and we will continue to work on this project as resources – mostly time – permits. However, to fully advance the initiative and to exploit the potential it offers will require additional staffing support in APA.