

Working with alumni donors

It is not uncommon for department chairs to be contacted by department alumni regarding donations to the department or by the Development Office regarding a potential donation from department alumni. Such donations are a tangible way for alumni to give back to their department and to help promote meaningful changes to the academic program(s) that helped shape them during a very formative time in their lives.

As part of this process, departments should maintain a list of ideas with concise, but well-reasoned descriptions and rationales of how the department might effectively use funding to enhance opportunities for faculty and students. For example, a gift to the department might fund student-faculty research, course-related field trips, a speaker series, scholarships for majors, a discretionary fund for expenditures beyond normal department budgets, major instrumentation, etc. Such a list should not be a “if-we-have-money-we-can-spend-it” wish list, but rather a carefully considered itemization of ideas that, if a funding opportunity became available, would endow real and meaningful improvements in the learning and teaching of departmental students and faculty.

Working with potential alumni donors

- **Listen.** Alumni donors may have specific reasons for contacting you as department chair regarding a possible donation to the department/university. They simply may not know who best to contact at the university regarding a donation, or alternatively, they may have specific goals/projects in mind for their donation related to your department. Let them explain their vision to give you a context for the nature of their donation.
- **Involve the Development Office.** The Development Office has experts on staff who have the skills and experience to work with the alumni donors in various situations and contexts. Ideally, potential donors are already working with someone in that office, but if not, suggest that the potential donor contact the Development Office and make an appointment to meet with staff members to discuss the nature of their potential gift and important considerations related to their gift (e.g., proper receipting for tax purposes, credit for the donation, etc.). In addition, it is a good idea to copy someone in the Development Office on emails concerning alumni donations as well.
- **Be prepared, upon request, to discuss how the department might effectively use additional funds to enhance opportunities for faculty and students.** Ideally, this conversation would include both the potential donor and a Development Office staff member and would include options from the list of ideas that your department has developed and/or from existing initiatives that could be enhanced with additional funds.
- **Help the potential donor understand your department and its needs.** A concise department summary document (e.g., faculty biographies with recent teaching, research, and publications; numbers of majors & minors; information about what majors do after graduation; etc.) helps potential donors to understand what is happening academically in the department and to assess how their gift might best impact departmental students and faculty.
- **Keep connections open with potential donors as you would with all department alumni** (see *Building connections with departmental alumni* (e.g., newsletters, web pages, Facebook, etc.)). Consider following up with the potential donor with an email or short letter thanking them for considering a donation and expressing a willingness to answer any questions that might arise.

Working with potential alumni donors

- **Realize that not all potential donors end up donating a gift.** That's OK...there could be a whole host of reasons that has nothing to do with you, your department, or the university. Hopefully, in the end, the alumna/alumnus realizes the care and thought that went into the process and has a deeper and stronger overall relationship with the university as a result of your interactions.

Working with alumni donors after a donation

- **Maintain communication with alumni donors and keep them informed of how their gift is impacting your program.** An occasional letter or email to the donor may help them feel appreciated and connected to the project and the faculty/students involved. Such communications can direct them to a weblink, provide a short update, or even a photo that they may find of interest. Not only is this a courteous response to a thoughtful gift to your department, but tangible results might lead to additional support from the donor (and other alumni).
- **Work with stewardship staff members in the Development Office to craft an annual report to donors** describing how income from their gift has been used during the past year (reports may come from the department chair or from the Development Office, depending on the gift). A copy of the annual report should be sent to the Director of Stewardship to record the contact in the Development Office database and files.
- **Consider writing the donor a letter from the department** in addition to the annual report. Also, encourage faculty in your department who have endowed chairs, University Professorships, Faculty Fellowships, etc. to work with the Development's Stewardship Office when asked to write letters thanking the donor of their award and describing how that award has benefitted them (e.g., how it has enabled them to make progress on a scholarly work). Again, please share copies of any correspondence related to stewardship of gifts with the Director of Stewardship.
- **Mention how the gift has impacted the department in the annual department newsletter, on the department website, etc.** (e.g., if funds were donated to support student-faculty research, then include this in an article about a research student presenting their work at a national conference).
- **Attend the Academic Awards Convocation each spring.** Many alumni donors attend the Academic Awards Convocation that is held each spring. Not only is the convocation an excellent setting to meet with alumni donors and to thank them for their gift, but it is also an opportunity for them to meet students (and their parents) who have benefitted from their generosity.
- **Consider attending Alumni Relations events** (e.g., Reunion Weekend, the Monon Bell game, off-campus alumni events in various cities, etc.) to visit with alumni.

Other Resources

additional contacts

- Associate Vice President for Development (<http://www.depauw.edu/alumni/>)
- Associate Vice President for Alumni Engagement (<http://www.depauw.edu/giving/>)
- Vice President for Communications & Strategic Initiatives
- Director of Stewardship (<http://www.depauw.edu/giving/>)

university policy & procedures

- n/a

relevant examples/forms/etc. in appendix

- example letter to a donor

external references

- n/a