

K-State Geography Alumni Board



Background

The Geography Alumni Advisory Board is a broad group of alumni who are devoted to the success of the Department and offer a fresh perspective. Input from alumni has proven to be critical as universities address fundamental changes and are forced to focus on priorities to pursue research initiatives, attract funding, and attract students. The Geography Alumni Board is the 11th to be formed at KSU. Most of the boards have formed in the past five years.

As an example, Dean White shared with us his perspective on the purpose of the Arts and Sciences advisory council:

- Universities need to have strong relationships with their alumni
- Cultivate friendships and relationships between alumni, faculty, and students
- Fresh perspective, broad perspective for brainstorming to address issues & opportunities
- Provide job connections (full time or internships)
- Image building
- Entrepreneurship (research/academic connections to government & industry)

As you will see below, many of the activities suggested for consideration by the Geography Alumni Advisory Board are related to what is listed above.

Mission Statement

Promote linkages among active alumni, students and faculty in order to strengthen the strategic position of KSU Geography.

Purpose

The purpose of the Alumni Advisory Board is to:

- Serve as a sounding board for the department;
- Support the department's initiatives to KSU administrators;
- Determine the focus, enhance the visibility, and set priorities for the Geography Department's alumni community;
- Encourage active involvement by the greatest number of Geography alumni;
- Give equal focus to student career development and linkage creation in academia, NGOs, industry, and government.

Current Members

The Board will include 10 to 20 members with a self-selected chair. Membership for a four-year term on the Board (with an option for reappointment) will be by invitation by the Head of the KSU Department of Geography upon the recommendations of the faculty or alumni board members.

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Suggested Board Activities

Activity 1: Annual meeting of the Alumni Advisory Board

Work with the Department Head to establish the schedule and agenda for the Fall Board meeting. Assume that about half of the meeting time will be for Departmental presentations of ideas, issues, and needs and that half of the meeting time will be for Board meetings. Need to provide read-ahead material on agenda items so that face time can be more productive.

Activity 2: Departmental Visits

Each Board member is expected to visit the Department at least once each year in order to visit with faculty and students. Although distance is a consideration, one trip *in addition to* the annual board meeting is encouraged. The purpose of the visit is enhanced visibility of alumni and stronger relationships among alumni and faculty and students. Suggested activities include one-on-one visits with faculty and students, speaking in a class, seminar presentations, and conducting interviews. The Board's Leader for this activity will draft a set of common talking points and make them available to the Board members. The purpose of the talking points is to ensure that alumni present a common core message to students, such as the value of education

received in the department, pride in being a Geography graduate, and the importance of giving back to the Department. The Leader will also track progress and report on this activity at the next Board meeting.

Activity 3: Communications

The Department will maintain an email listserv for alumni that can be used by the Department and by Board members to broadcast communications. This communication tool can be used to promote broader visibility of departmental functions such as the annual GTU banquet and homecoming weekend activities. The Department will also add an alumni page to the Geography website. The web page will include a mechanism for joining the alumni listserv. The website already includes an RSS feed. The Board's Leader for this activity will assist by reviewing the alumni web page, by providing general guidance on Alumni communications issues, by encouraging alumni to provide contact information for the alumni database, and will report on the progress of this activity at the next Board meeting. Disseminate information about careers in geography provided by AAG.

Activity 4: Annual appeal for contributions

Annually, the Alumni Advisory Board will issue a call for contributions. This may be accomplished in the annual newsletter and/or via the listserv. The current plan is to solicit input from both faculty and students on what the funding needs are. In this way the Board's appeal can be for targeted, high priority funding needs. It is believed that alumni will be more eager to make a contribution if the appeal defines specific needs that directly support students. Make personal appeals to specific alumni as appropriate.

Activity 5: Career Day

Schedule an annual "career day", probably during the Spring Semester. The career day will provide undergraduate and graduate students an opportunity to practice their interview skills. There will likely be a morning lecture discussing resume-writing skills, interview skills, and tips for how to benefit from career fairs. The rest of the day will be devoted to one-on-one interview opportunities. Alumni with hiring needs will be encouraged to attend, and will also have the opportunity to review the resumes and interview results. All students in the Department and/or taking Geography classes will be invited to attend, with interview preference given to students actively seeking internships for full time jobs. A report will be provided at the next Board meeting. Include discussion about Geography careers provided by AAG.

Activity 6: Department History

Faculty requested Alumni Board feedback on publication of the updated Departmental History. The general response was that the Department should take a dual approach—ensuring broad distribution of the history by sending it to alums in electronic format via the alumni listserv and by investing to publish a bound version of suitable quality to serve as a gift to honorees or to be available for purchase. This was accomplished in January 2008. A reception was held at the Beach Museum on campus 29 January 2008 to celebrate the release of the spiral-bound *History of Geography at Kansas State University* and to honor the authors: Professors David Kromm, Charles Bussing, and Stephen Stover, as well as Professor Huber Self who authored earlier versions).

Activity 7: Mixers at Conferences

A great opportunity exists to foster alumni/student/faculty relationships by hosting mixers at conferences such as AAG and ESRI. The approach could be a reception or dinner which would provide an opportunity to network, a meeting which would provide the opportunity for students and alumni to present, or some combination. The cost of reserving meeting rooms will be an issue and requires research each year. The Board's Leader for this activity would be responsible for identifying conference meeting opportunities, for researching cost issues and funding strategies, and for identifying an alumnus who will attend the conference(s) and be willing to lead the event. The Leader will also provide a report at the next Board meeting. Successful receptions were held at the 2006 AAG Meeting in Chicago, 2007 AAG Meeting in San Francisco, 2008 AAG Meeting in Boston, and one is planned for the 2009 AAG Meeting in Las Vegas.

Activity 8: Encourage Undergraduate Involvement in GTU

Although this issue will primarily be resolved via actions taken by faculty and by graduate students, it is appropriate for the Alumni Advisory Board to provide feedback and to support the strategy that is adopted within the Department. The Board's Leader for this activity will maintain communication with the Department, provide feedback, communicate with the Advisory Board and alumni if specific steps are identified for the Advisory Board, and provide a report at the next Board meeting.