The University of Sydney’s future success increasingly depends upon our ability to engage our 190,000 alumni – and 46 alumni associations located around the world – to leverage our national and international reputation and create the climate of benefaction necessary to achieve our goals.

Alumni engagement

In 2006, the Standing Committee of Convocation was rebranded as “The University of Sydney Alumni Council”. More than a name change, the nomenclature recognises the important new role of the council as the University’s peak alumni body as well as its role as an advisor to the University’s Alumni Relations Office.

Opportunities for alumni to engage in the life of the University were extended through the establishment of three new alumni chapters: Malaysia, East Coast USA and Central West New South Wales. Four alumni associations, in Singapore, Hong Kong, Victoria and the USA/Canada (SUGUNA), were re-invigorated.

The alumni magazine, *The Gazette*, was re-designed and rebranded at the beginning of the year as the *Sydney Alumni Magazine* (SAM), with four editions produced in 2006. Bi-monthly alumni e-newsletters were introduced to complement SAM and distributed to over 18,000 alumni in 2006.

International alumni engagement increased significantly. In Shanghai, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore more than 800 alumni attended special receptions, and a range of other smaller alumni networking events were held. The Shanghai event took place at the Shanghai Grand Theatre and attracted a record number of alumni, and the Malaysian reception led to the formation of the Malaysia Alumni Association (SUGMA) with younger alumni pledging strong support.

In New York, Washington and San Francisco alumni activities continued to grow. Three events were hosted and/or attended by the Ambassador to the United States, Dennis Richardson (BA ’69). The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Alumni Relations Director attended the Sydney University Graduates of North America (SUGUNA) conference in San Francisco, and the East Coast Alumni Chapter of SUGUNA was launched in New York. Australian activities included alumni reunions and receptions in Melbourne and Dubbo.

In the United Kingdom, alumni met for the Autumn Lecture at Magdalen College, where Jonathon Porritt CBE spoke on “Climate Change, Humankind and the Apocalypse”.

The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Principal of University Relations attended the 2006 Summer Reception, which was held at the Royal College of General Practitioners. The UK Alumni Association established a young alumni group in order to provide relevant programs and events in this key market.

Significant progress was made in each country in building alumni ambassadorial programs through alumni associations, and extensive surveys were undertaken to assess international engagement opportunities, which will inform the focus of outreach in 2007 and beyond.

In Australia, the Sydney Graduate Connections Breakfast Series flourished. Four events featuring key alumni attracted over 120 people each, and provided an important networking forum. Numerous faculty and class-based reunions were held on campus and throughout the state, including the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Faculty of Medicine and the Pharmacy Annual Ball. Over 30 University-wide events for alumni and members of the community were coordinated by the Alumni Relations Office in 2006, including the Vice-Chancellor’s Distinguished Lecture with Professor Quentin Skinner from the University of Cambridge, the Charles Perkins Oration (which recognises Indigenous contributions to the community) with Professor Sandra Eades, and the Annual University Reception.

A new format for the annual Alumni Awards, which recognises graduates who have provided outstanding community service, was introduced. An Alumni Awards Presentation recognising Australian film director and producer Bruce Beresford (BA ’64) attracted more than 250 guests, a 150 per cent increase over 2005. Professor Jocelyn Choy (BA ’61, PhD ’64) and Professor Kim Oates (MBBS ’67, MD ’84, DSc ’06) were also honoured. Fiona Roughly (BA ’06) was awarded the 2006 Convocation Medal for her contributions to University activities.

A major online alumni survey to increase business and degree specialisation information on the alumni database attracted over 4000 responses. The total number of contactable alumni with valid addresses grew to over 145,000 in 2006.

The new alumni website continues to attract significant numbers of visitors. Over three million hits were recorded on the site in 2006.
Philanthropy

In 2006, total private gifts and non-government grants to the University reached $30 million, somewhat down from the previous year’s record high of $32 million. The income differential is largely due to the 2005 Henderson Bequest of $18 million, and a slight delay in the timing of year-end direct marketing campaigns in both Australia and the USA which will see results flow through early 2007. Giving through bequests and estate gifts remain a major component of the total revenues, equalling $10.2 million dollars or 36 per cent of the total. Confirmed bequest intentions grew from 110 to 130, while realisations improved modestly from 52 to 57.

The University, through its Development Office, foundations and faculty initiatives, supported a number of campaigns and special projects to raise funds for infrastructure (the Veterinary Science Foundation, Law School, School of Information Technologies, Pharmacy and University Museums), scholarship (Law, Graduate Studies, Pharmacy, Architecture, Economics and Business, Medicine and Sydney Conservatorium of Music), and endowment (Science Foundation for Physics, Medical Foundation, Pharmacy, Architecture, Science, Humanities, Conservatorium of Music, Dentistry and Engineering).

The University of Sydney continues to advance a more collegiate and collaborative model of prospect and donor engagement amongst internal stakeholders. To that end, workshops were held with deans and other senior level staff to increase understanding of the University’s alumni relations and fundraising practices and to help identify current activities and future fundraising priorities. Dovetailing with this was the advancement of a University-wide fundraising project registry which will underpin future fundraising activity, in line with new fundraising procedures and rules for foundations.

Policies, procedures and reporting continued to be developed and refined with a view to ensuring that all gifts were appropriately received, acknowledged and stewarded in a timely manner consistent with donors’ wishes, and that communications with donors were maintained at the highest standard.

More than 2880 alumni and friends generously provided $1075 million in support of many Annual Fund campaigns in 2006 for projects including scholarships, fellowships, research infrastructure, and academic and library resources. This represented a 22 per cent increase in participation and a 24 per cent increase in income.

Database development

The central alumni and donor database continued to develop in its sophistication and capability. The number of users increased, as development and alumni relations officers in faculties and foundations become more familiar with it. Data sharing has improved, and the database is now being used to facilitate annual fund segmentation and assist foundations and alumni associations to maintain contact with their constituencies.

During 2006 an upgrade of the Advance system commenced. This is a multifaceted process which will see the system web-enabled in the first half of 2007. This will allow for greater ease of access to authorised users from anywhere in the world and will encourage increased utilisation of the system’s capabilities.

The “Lost Alumni” project which commenced in 2005 has maintained its impetus into 2006 with a further reduction in non-contactable alumni of 3.6 per cent.

The Sydney Conservatorium of Music was involved with a pilot project in 2006 to develop a lost alumni website. During 2007 this project will be expanded to include all lost alumni regardless of faculty. The service will be accessible from the alumni home page as well as from faculty sites.

Chronicle daughter

Walking down the aisle of the University of Sydney’s historic Great Hall to accept her degree held particular significance for Arts graduate Kath Bicknell (BA ‘06). She was the fourth generation of woman graduates in her family.

Kath graduated wearing her great-grandmother’s 100-year old gown, hood and trencheder. “It was incredibly moving and symbolic ...” she says.

Kath’s great-grandmother, Catherine Vernon Farmer (BA 1908) studied at the University a century ago, when gowns were worn each day. The family’s connection to the University is embodied in the old Arts Faculty gown, which Kath describes as “faded, moth-eaten and very, very special.”

Catherine’s daughter, (Kath Bicknell’s grandmother) Diana Vernon Watson (BA ’71), wore the gown after attending the University as a mature age student in her 50s. One of Diana’s four children, Catherine Wilson (BA ’70) also wore the gown.

All four of Diana’s children attended the University of Sydney, with Kath’s mother, Anne Bicknell, nee Watson, (MBBS) graduating in 1978.

Kath doesn’t plan to start the fifth generation of women graduates any time soon. But when she does, the gown will be waiting.

- Fran Molloy