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What's Past Is Possible: Opportunities and Perspectives for Library Alumni Resources

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Abstract

When considering the theme “What’s Past Is Prologue,” there might not be a better application than to think of former students at our colleges and universities. As they venture into the role of campus alumni, their information needs become complicated when they lose access to the wealth of electronic resources that are available at most campuses. Having resources at hand while a student is wonderful, but the grim reality of having little available upon graduation can be a bit of a letdown. A growing number of colleges and universities are offering alumni a suite of electronic resources that are either bundled as part of their existing package, negotiated, or purchased separately. The value to the vendor may be as an additional revenue line or exposure to a larger population. This might be especially true in business where the need for information and news resources is ongoing. The value to the library may be as a connection to a mission of lifelong learning that can partner with other aspects of the school. Even in a time of tight resource budgets, this can be a good investment by the library. Kresge Library Services (Michigan) and ProQuest are no strangers to alumni resources. Kresge Library Services (of the Ross School of Business) has long been providing resources to alumni and is featured as a key lifelong learning element of the school. ProQuest has provided a number of alumni packages to libraries over the years as well. In this presentation, we will hear from a library and a vendor about how they approach alumni researchers, resources, and the opportunities they provide to these organizations.

Introduction

When considering the theme “What’s Past Is Prologue,” there might not be a better application than to think of former students at our colleges and universities. As they venture into the role of campus alumni, their information needs become complicated when they lose access to the wealth of electronic resources that are available at most campuses. Having resources at hand while a student is wonderful, but the grim reality of having little available upon graduation can be a bit of a letdown. A growing number of colleges and universities are offering alumni a suite of electronic resources that are either bundled as part of their existing package, negotiated, or purchased separately. The value to the vendor may be as an additional revenue line or exposure to a larger population. This might be especially true in business where the need for information and news resources is ongoing. The value to the library may be as a connection to a mission of lifelong learning that can partner with other aspects of the school. Even in a time of tight resource budgets, this can be a good investment by the library. Kresge Library Services (Michigan) and ProQuest are no strangers to alumni resources. Kresge Library Services (of the Ross School of Business) has long been providing resources to alumni and is featured as a key lifelong learning element of the

school. ProQuest has provided a number of alumni packages to libraries over the years as well. In this presentation, we shared the perspective from the library and the vendor as well as shared the results of a survey of business librarians taken in October 2017. While libraries might view the alumni as secondary or tertiary members of the university community, there is great value and need in providing these services. Additionally, as the traditional aspects and roles of the university library are challenged, these services enable libraries to move more proactively in new directions to provide value to the broader university community.

Vendor/Publisher Perspective

ProQuest is committed to helping libraries provide information solutions to all their patrons—including alumni—wherever possible and to the extent that we can do so without harming our publishing partners.

Libraries may provide alumni with access to most of ProQuest’s aggregated databases by paying a percentage uplift on top of the institutional subscription. Depending on factors such as copyright ownership, some Perpetual Access collections may be available for the library to offer to alumni under the institution’s license agreement, while others may require a separate fee.

In terms of what kinds of ProQuest aggregated products are being provided to alumni by our customers:

- Multidisciplinary and Business databases are most popular, comprising 60% of active alumni products.
- 66% of ProQuest Alumni sales are at doctoral institutions.
- U.S. academic institutions have been more likely to purchase alumni resources.

In order to preserve the rights and business of ProQuest's partner publishers, certain conditions will apply to alumni products. A subscribing institution must be able to provide alumni IP access and track who has signed up to use alumni services. When customers order an alumni version of a ProQuest database, they are presented with a modification in the Terms & Conditions that explicitly states that *"All use of the Services by alumni must be only for personal research and/or educational purposes."*

In the rare event that ProQuest or the library becomes aware of any activities by alumni that could adversely impact the rights and business of content providers, ProQuest may discontinue alumni access and refund any remaining fees on a pro rata basis.

In addition, any publisher restrictions are enforced, including the blocking of full-text access for any publishers who have not permitted their content to be made available to alumni via ProQuest. In those cases the library will have to negotiate such access directly with those publishers. A good example is Factiva. ProQuest acts as the exclusive distributor of Factiva in the academic market, but not for alumni access. Because Dow Jones has encountered problems with remote alumni access in the past, any library interested in providing alumni access to Factiva must seek a separate agreement directly with Dow Jones.

Despite a perception among some librarians that alumni versions of databases are not worthwhile due to publisher restrictions, in fact only 2% of the full-text titles in ProQuest aggregated databases are restricted.

And, while usage patterns among alumni differ somewhat from the academic user base—slightly less use of scholarly journals and higher use of magazine/trade/news sources and reports—overall

alumni use is less than 1% of annual ABI/INFORM usage, suggesting there is little risk to a publisher's direct business.

Librarian Perspective

From the academic library perspective, there are some tremendous challenges and opportunities that come with engaging your school's alumni. For many libraries, the alumni are viewed as a secondary or tertiary audience for both resources and services. There is definitely a good reason for this as many academic libraries do not feel that they adequately support the information needs of students and faculty, making the concept of adding additional "customers" or "patrons" to the mix illogical. While there is definitely a cost in real collection dollars and staff-time to support alumni audience members, there is a real value and opportunity that one should consider. Much of the information literacy efforts have focused on getting students to consider the value of library-supplied resources for their research projects. It would make sense that as students become alumni, their information needs might still be great—and the library should still be a place to find these resources. As we view this (at Kresge Library Services), this is an opportunity, not a problem. Academic libraries have been undergoing a great deal of change over the last 10, 20, 30 (and more) years—and will continue to do so into the future. This is one way that a library can be involved in this fundamental change and provide value to a new audience.

Resources Offered to Alumni

Kresge Library Services is a division of the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The Kresge Library has long provided services to alumni of the Ross School of Business—since the early 2000s. The resources that are offered to alumni may be found on our Alumni Services page (Michigan Ross, *Services for Alumni*). The ability to provide information resources to the school's alumni stemmed in large part from the school's computing services department maintaining a user database of Ross alumni, meaning that resources can be offered through the library's proxy service. For the sake of this discussion, library resources for alumni are relevant only if they can access resources remotely and not by walk-in use. Kresge Library has not charged for this service nor has the school charged alumni an annual fee for access to these or other services. The University of Michigan Alumni Association offers

a suite of resources available with membership (ProQuest and Project MUSE), and we have decided not to replicate these in our offerings to Ross alumni (Michigan Alumni Association).

The primary focus of the resources offered to alumni is career related. To this end, we have provided Vault Campus and CareerBeam to alumni—and they remain two key career resources offered to the Ross community. In addition, we have a number of resources that document companies and industries to help them further explore career possibilities. These include D&B Hoovers, Mergent Online (as well as Mergent Intellect and Mergent Archives), as well as Business Monitor International and ORBIS (from Bureau Van Dijk). We also provide a few news resources including EBSCO's Business Source Alumni Edition and Gale's Business Insights: Global. The library also provides a few resources to alumni as a discount program (usually providing fairly modest cost reductions from 5% to 10%) if they purchase through our established contact. These are not as popular as the resources that alumni may use directly.

The challenge with business information resources is that academic libraries often pay pennies on the dollar compared to what commercial clients pay. The great discounts offered to universities give the students access to leading tools and give the vendors and publishers the ability to grow name recognition among the students who will be the next generation of corporate decision makers. The resources made available to Ross alumni are intended for personal use only, and they are not permitted to share them with others. However, that is very difficult—or impossible—to police.

The library acquires these resources for the alumni community in two ways. First, the library has purchased access for Ross alumni directly from the publisher or vendor. These purchases always leverage the existing campus subscription as part of the negotiations. Should the library cancel a subscription that also has an extra charge for alumni access, it is very certain that the alumni access would be cancelled as well. The other way is through negotiated access as a no-cost extension of an existing or new campus resource. The total cost to the library for alumni resources is less than 1% of our collections budget, but this is still difficult to support when you are cutting databases.

Two other areas where we are looking to support alumni is through open access resources and through school publications, which may be particularly interesting to this community. During the University of Michigan's recent bicentennial, we created a guide to showcase resources on the history of the Ross School of Business, all of which are freely available on the Internet (Michigan Ross, *Historical Resources: Overview*). While these do not technically constitute resources licensed for alumni, they can be valuable tools that this community may find useful and interesting.

In addition to resources, Kresge Library also offers a full suite of services for Ross alumni. We aspire to be very engaged with our alumni and make it very easy for them to reach out to us for reference assistance. We engage our alumni via all the basic reference means, including phone, e-mail, chat, and in person. Our chat widget is available on the alumni resources page and the other pages they are likely to visit. We also provide an additional service since we maintain an archive of syllabi from the Ross School of Business. There are many instances when graduates would need to obtain a syllabus from a class for a certification or to pass out of additional coursework in seeking advanced degrees. We can often connect graduates with syllabi for the years since our archive was created (in 2007). While our interaction with Ross alumni has been relatively low (especially as compared to interaction with current students), we have seen steady increases over the past few years (Figure 1).

One of the important aspects of Kresge Library's alumni resources program is that it allows us to engage with the school's Development & Alumni Relations group. One of the big programs launched a few years ago was Alumni Advantage, a series of programs and services that were made available to Ross alumni (Michigan Ross, *Alumni*). While our library services predate the start of Alumni Advantage by quite a number of years, we rolled Kresge database access and reference services into the Alumni Advantage program, and it is considered part of the Lifelong Learning aspect of the program. In 2018, we are planning to start Web-only interactive instruction sessions for Ross alumni that will be scheduled at various times of day to reflect their location all over the world. These are opportunities to connect with important members of the Ross community and something that we are happy to do.



Figure 1. Alumni requests to Kresge Library Services (2005–2017).

Survey and Conclusions

In October 2017, we surveyed business librarians on their practices, resources, and services when working with alumni members of their community. While the survey was sent broadly, the vast majority of responses came from Europe and North America (Seeman & Hogan, 2017). Some of the high-level responses to the survey are found here:

- 62% offered alumni resources to alumni.
- Just under 50% had a library page specifically for alumni.
- In regard to funding purchases of alumni resources:
 - Added onto current packages at no extra cost (21.15%).
 - Added onto current packages at an incremental cost (11.54%).
 - Identify freely available resources (such as open access resources or Export.gov) (24.04%).
 - Do not offer any resources (16.35%).
 - Other (8.65%).

What surprised the presenters was the question on the perception of value. On a scale of 1 to 9 (with 1 being the lowest value and 9 being the highest value), we asked the librarians to rate how they

view the value of alumni access to library resources. We also asked them to rate the perceived value to alumni for access to these resources. Librarians rated alumni resources at a mean of 5.09 and their perception of how the alumni value these resources at a mean of only 6.03.

We were able to pull together some of the comments that we think conveyed the value of these types of resources and services. The comments include these:

- Allowing alumni would enormously increase our potential user numbers and would lead to massive price increases for databases because our database costs are based on user population.
- If the typical career path for graduates is in smaller businesses or even entrepreneurial activities, it would be valuable to have an agreement with a vendor that enabled limited access to some of our resources for 2–3 years after graduation, because the small businesses would be very unlikely to subscribe to these resources.
- Alumni access has been made easier for us by UK wide negotiations by JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee).
- Alumni ask for access all the time. We can't even facilitate access to the resources that routinely license to alumni at no additional

cost such a Project Muse or JSTOR because University IT is not motivated to implement authentication. University Alumni Office doesn't see it as a priority either.

- Value of access to electronic resources is tricky. If we had alumni-specific collections, they wouldn't receive the same content they had in school, so their perception of the value might be high at first, but very low once they realize what they have. Business students especially would be in for a rude awakening, as they expect access to market research reports and other privileged information.
- I work at a state university that consistently has budget problems. The only thing I ever

do with collections is try to [keep] the few business databases we have from being cancelled. I can't even imagine an environment at this university where we would be able to talk about alumni resources. That being said, it is common for our alumni to work with students in the business college, and I'm always happy to [[let] alumni use what we have available to them in-person in the library.

Alumni resources are an interesting new avenue for academic libraries to travel. And while there are many compelling reasons to embrace this in many libraries, the challenges of coverage and costs are ones that should not be entered into lightly.

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