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Developing the Metropolia Alumni Relations Program

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<p>The target of this Master's Thesis was to create a practical plan to further develop the alumni relations program at Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The plan will act as a guide for the program on how to reach and engage Metropolia's students and alumni in order to create a sustainable and active alumni relations program. Special attention was given to the international students and alumni, which is an understandable approach from the global perspective as many of the Metropolia graduates find employment at some point of their careers from abroad and the Master's programme itself is international in nature.</p> <p>As an organization, Metropolia alumni relations program is quite new, just like its host. Since Metropolia is the largest university of applied sciences in Finland with 16 500 students and 67 degree programs, the institution has an extremely diverse membership and this membership will also be the target audience of the alumni relations program.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the study was based on service marketing theories. Service marketing is about promises made and kept to customers. It differs from traditional marketing due to the nature of the product; services offered are heterogeneous and perishable. Alumni activities are such intangible services. This study focused on two particular service marketing strategies, namely communications-based marketing model and the strategy gaps model of service quality.</p> <p>The study resulted in a practical plan, which suggests ways for the alumni relations program to gain the attention of the students and alumni and hence for the program to evolve into an active and sustainable one. The plan suggests a marketing strategy to get new students involved in creating a Metropolia "spirit" from day one through the alumni relations program. It also offers suggestions on funding the alumni activities. The plan also gives suggestions on how to activate those, who have graduated from the institution or its predecessors.</p>	
Keywords	alumni, alumni relations program, service marketing strategies

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Research Setting	1
1.2	Research Questions	4
1.3	Source Material	5
2	Conceptual Framework	6
2.1	Definitions	6
2.2	Service Marketing	6
2.3	Communications-Based Marketing Model	8
2.4	Strategy Gaps Model of Service Quality	11
3	Current State Analysis	15
3.1	Metropolia Strategy	15
3.2	Alumni Relations at Metropolia	16
3.3	The Alumni Survey of 2013	17
3.4	The Alumni Survey of 2014	18
3.5	Results of the Alumni Survey of 2014	18
3.5.1	Background Information	19
3.5.2	Alumni Association Survey	21
3.5.3	Development Ideas for the Alumni Association	24
3.5.4	Open Feedback	26
3.6	The Current State of Metropolia Alumni Activities	27
4	Objectives of the Development Plan	33
5	Tactics: Suggestions for Developing the Metropolia Alumni Relations Program	35
5.1	Funding the Alumni Activities	37
5.2	Alumni Activities	39
5.3	Marketing the Alumni Relations Program	41
5.4	Alumni Relations Program in Social Media	44
5.5	The Development Plan	46
5.6	Limitations	51
6	Feedback	52
7	Conclusions	55

References

57

Appendices

Appendix 1. Alumni Survey 2014

Appendix 2. Results of Alumni Survey 2014

Appendix 3. Summary of the Development Plan

1 Introduction

Alumni associations and alumni relations programs are an important part of higher education. While there is a long history of alumni traditions in other countries, such as the United States, Finnish educational organizations have yet to fully acknowledge the importance and potential of both the alumni (i.e. those who have graduated from an educational institution), alumni activities and the alumni associations and programs representing them. This Master's Thesis will focus on how to develop and improve the Metropolia University of Applied Science's alumni relations program. I will conduct a current state analysis of the Metropolia alumni work and alumni relations program and create a plan on how to develop them. This plan will then be presented to the university representatives and will aid Metropolia in developing the alumni relations program. A plan summary will give concise practical advice to the program coordinator.

1.1 Research Setting

Higher education in Finland consists of two types of institutions, the universities and the universities of applied sciences (former polytechnics). Both offer Bachelor's and Master's degrees, but while the universities are more research based, the universities of applied sciences focus on professional skills with a strong connection to working life, applied research and a contribution to developing regions and organizations. Metropolia, whose alumni work will be studied in this Master's Thesis, belongs in the latter group.

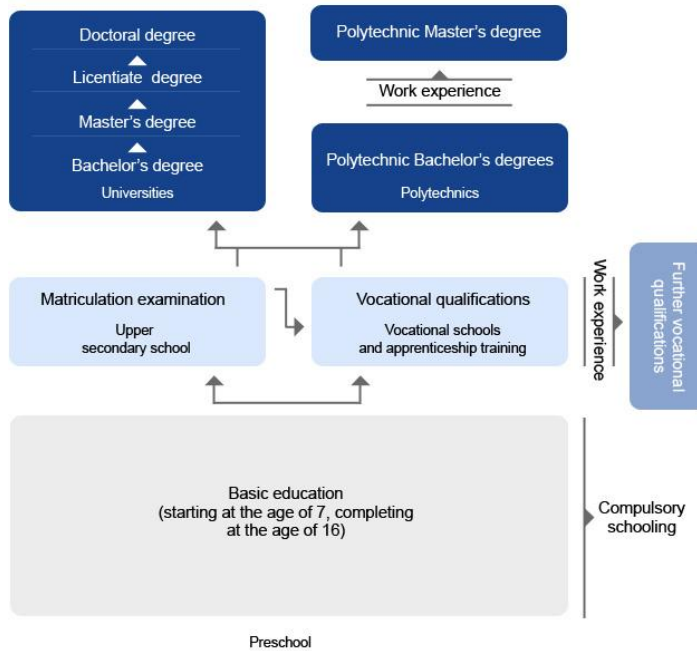


Figure 1. Finnish education system chart (Education System in Finland n.d.)

Higher education as a business is in the position where institutions have to compete with other universities globally, not just domestically. This means that being the leading university in a specific region or even in your country might not be enough for long term growth. Most institutions of higher education must appear attractive globally speaking, if they plan on succeeding and expanding. As this Master's Thesis will show, alumni work can play an important part in marketing universities both domestically and internationally. International students are an important part of the university's student body and their potential as representing the alumni and the university itself should also be taken into consideration.

One of the competitive factors of the Finnish higher education system is the cost. For a Finnish or EU/ETA national, the out of pocket costs of studying in Finland are unmatched:

Country	Out of Pocket Cost	Median Income	Out of Pocket Cost % of Median Income	Rank
Australia	\$14,187	\$23,017	61.64%	13
Canada	\$9,358	\$26,623	35.15%	9
Denmark	\$4,021	\$22,929	17.54%	4
England and Wales	\$9,543	\$24,652	38.71%	11
Finland	\$830	\$21,010	3.95%	1
France	\$7,242	\$20,660	35.05%	8
Germany	\$5,408	\$22,020	24.56%	6
Japan	\$20,868	\$22,790	91.57%	14
Latvia	\$4,920	\$13,646	36.05%	10
Mexico	\$8,012	\$4,615	173.62%	15
Netherlands	\$6,060	\$28,032	21.62%	5
Norway	\$3,017	\$26,623	11.33%	3
New Zealand	\$6,468	\$19,265	33.58%	7
Sweden	\$2,025	\$20,716	9.78%	2
USA	\$14,382	\$26,990	53.28%	12

Figure 2. Global Higher Education Rankings 2010 (Usher & Meadow 2010)

Finnish universities are doing fairly well on ranking lists as well; there are, for example, several Finnish universities on the Shanghai list (Academic Ranking of World Universities 2012). Therefore, Finnish universities are attractive for both academic and financial reasons. The problems Finnish universities are facing, however, are the funding and perhaps the challenge of acquiring enough global attention to attract a variety of students. Public funding, which usually means free education, is unsustainable if many of the students are not going to stay in Finland after they have gained their education to work and pay taxes. Therefore, some institutions charge a tuition fee for non-EU/ETA students. Either way, other means of gathering funding must be accumulated, for example through sponsorships and donations. A good and active alumni relations program can be an excellent way of reaching out to potential students and can be a big help in gathering funding.

1.2 Research Questions

Alumni work is something that has been a personal interest of mine for a while now and hence I suggested to the Head of Degree Programme that I could write my MBA Master's Thesis on the Metropolia Alumni Association and alumni activities. My original Master's Thesis idea was to create a branding project for the alumni association, since as a relatively new organization, it is not yet as well known. However, there was already a project focusing on theoretical aspects of the alumni activities underway, (Kaarni 2014) so my Master's Thesis will focus on further developing the alumni activities in a more practical manner. Since the status of the actual alumni association was and has been unclear, the objective of this Master's Thesis is to make a plan to develop Metropolia's alumni relations program. I myself live in the United States, hence I will give special attention to international students and alumni. This is also an understandable approach from the global perspective as many of the Metropolia graduates find employment at some point of our careers from abroad and the Master's program itself is international in nature.

In 2012, when I began researching the association and alumni activities, I found out that there was plenty of information available for Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, but not as much for the alumni association or alumni activities in general. I did find one document called "Toimintasuunnitelma 2010", which described the plan of operation for Metropolia Alumni for the year of 2010. It described planned events and clubs and has very little information, if any, regarding the association's long term strategy. Other than that, I could only find the rules and registration information regarding the association. No long term strategy was apparent. If strategy or quality documents exist, I was unable to locate any. Therefore, based on my initial findings, there was a need to organize and further develop the Metropolia alumni relations program in general, which is the objective of my Master's Thesis.

The research questions considered are 1) in what way can Metropolia's alumni relations program be further developed to meet the needs of both the students and the alumni and 2) how can the alumni relations program be made sustainable? I will take the international aspect of alumni work into consideration in answering both questions and pay special attention to another interest of mine; social media presence.

1.3 Source Material

There is plenty of previous research published regarding alumni work and alumni associations, but these sources often deal with foreign, namely American, universities. Alumni activities in Finnish universities have not been as widely studied, but there have been several theses written on the topic during the last few years. This further supports the hypothesis that Finnish alumni relations programs are a relatively new concept. I also found several alumni surveys online from different universities, all published within the last 3 years, which show a rising interest in exploring the possibilities offered by the alumni and alumni associations. I also found a couple of theses dealing with the international alumni work, which is an approach with plenty of potential in today's global job markets. Also, the previously mentioned Master's Thesis by Christina Kaarni discussing the operations model of alumni programs for Metropolia Business School was published in spring 2014. Ms Kaarni's thesis will give an excellent theoretical background to organizing the alumni relations program.

2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this Master's Thesis consists of defining terms and describing the marketing theories I have used in my development plan. I will first offer some relevant definitions and then focus on defining service marketing. I will then focus on the two models examined more thoroughly in this Master's Thesis; communications-based marketing model of relationship marketing and the strategy gaps model of service quality.

2.1 Definitions

An alumnus is a "person who has attended or has graduated from a particular school, college, or university" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d), whereas an alumni associations and programs represents everyone who has graduated from that particular institution. Graduates from an institution are alumni, even if they do not join the alumni association or participate in alumni activities. Joining alumni associations or programs is voluntary, but services such as events, discounts, magazines are often only available for paying members. In recent years the trend in the alumni association field has been "interdependence" rather than traditional "independence" from the parent universities. Hence, having alumni relations program instead of actual alumni association has become more common (Alumni Association Funding Models: Summary Findings from 20 Universities 2010) Due to the nature of alumni activities, they can be counted as a part of the service sector, when considering implementable marketing strategies.

2.2 Service Marketing

Service marketing is about promises made and kept to customers. It differs from traditional marketing due to the nature of the product; services are not objects, but rather performances, which cannot be felt, tasted, touched or seen in the same manners as goods can be. The services offered are heterogeneous and perishable, which means they cannot be inventoried (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985). Intangibility is the clearest distinction which separates goods marketing from service marketing (Bateson 1979). Alumni activities are such intangible services; even the membership cards can nowadays be electronic as is the case with the University of Helsinki Alumni Association. Of course some products offered to the alumni such as t-shirts and coffee mugs

are an integral part of alumni work, but they are not the main focus of the alumni activities marketing. Those products are instead supporting the service marketing. The service marketing triangle below shows the parties involved in the strategy: the company/service provider, the employees and the customers. All three interlinked groups have together important roles in creating a solid service marketing strategy and delivering the services. The triangle also shows the three types of marketing that should be carried out in order for the service to succeed: internal marketing, interactive marketing and external marketing. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985) I will be discussing some service marketing models in the following subchapters.

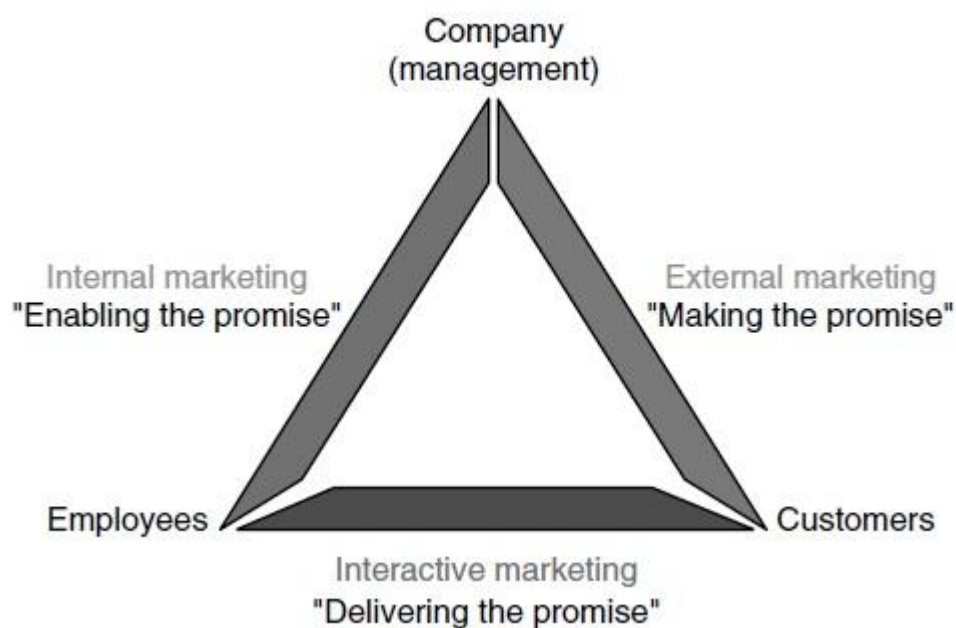


Figure 3. The service marketing triangle (Zeithaml , Bitner & Gremler 2010)

Some marketing strategies can, however, be implemented to service marketing from traditional marketing. These strategies, which could also be used in alumni relations program marketing, include stressing tangible cues, using personal sources instead of non-personal ones, simulate or stimulate word-of-mouth communications, creating a strong organizational image, engaging in post-purchase (post-joining) communications, emphasizing the selection and training of public contact employees, managing the clients (the alumni), using multisite locations, customizing service and making simultaneous adjustments in demand and capacity to achieve a closer match between two. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985) Other types of strategies that could be imple-

mented in alumni relation program marketing are both the emotional and the logical/rational appeal. (Yeshin 1998)

Service marketing strategy is about delivering experiences and intangibles to customers. All functions of an organization must work together in order to create an effective service marketing strategy; it is centered on the customer, usage and relationships. The four Ps of marketing (namely product, price, promotion and place) fulfill the service marketing strategy only partly. Additional Ps are needed; people, process and physical evidence. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998) In the case of alumni relations program the product are the alumni services, price is the possible membership fee, promotion is the program visibility and place is mostly online. The additional Ps are more complex. Process is an element of the service marketing mix and addresses how the activities by which the services are delivered. In the alumni relations program this would be, for example, the procedure in which alumni services are delivered. The second addition P is people i.e. the human factors in the strategy. This P comprises those who work with the alumni and the alumni themselves. The third and last P is physical evidence, which encompasses all of the tangible elements. In the alumni relation program's case, for example, this could be the brochures, letterheads etc. (Zeithaml , Bitner & Gremler 2010) I will be discussing the implementation of some these strategies later in this Master's Thesis.

2.3 Communications-Based Marketing Model

One model that is applicable in service marketing is the communications-based marketing model of relationship marketing. Although communication has always been a critical element in marketing, this model addresses three key points: messages, stakeholders and interactivity. These help to develop the communication marketing strategy even further by showing that marketing today is communications dependent. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998) While the model was originally published several years ago, it still remains valid and relevant to many practitioners and academics. (Von Freyermann 2010) It is applicable in the case of marketing such services as alumni relations program. The model calls for interactive communication at three levels: corporate, marketing and marketing communications. It provides directions to focus better in acquiring, retaining and maintaining relationships with customers and other stakeholders. The model also shows that brand communication includes more than marketing communication and that managing the brand communication must take into consideration not just the cus-

tomers, but also employees, media and the community. Communication is the main integrative element in managing brand relationships. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998)

The communications-based marketing model believes that listening should be given as much importance as saying, so that an interactive relationship becomes the focus. Having a customer relationship without communication is impossible, so two-way communication is a necessity. The traditional communications model includes a source to encode the message, channel through which the message is transmitted, noise that interferes with the processing, receiver who decodes the message and feedback that sends the response back to the source. In the case of marketing the source is the company, the message is the service, the channel is the means of distribution, the noise is the competition and the receiver is the customer. The feedback is the information received through customer service and research. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998)

The communications-based marketing model further expands on the traditional communication model. It also takes into consideration the three levels mentioned before: corporate, marketing and marketing communications. The primary idea of the model is to recognize the communication dimensions and manage them strategically in order to avoid mixed messages. A common goal is needed for all the communication levels. The model recognizes that everything a company does and doesn't do sends a message that can either strengthen or weaken relationships between the company and the customer. The model is complex as seen in the figure below, and I will be discussing the applicable parts of it. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998)

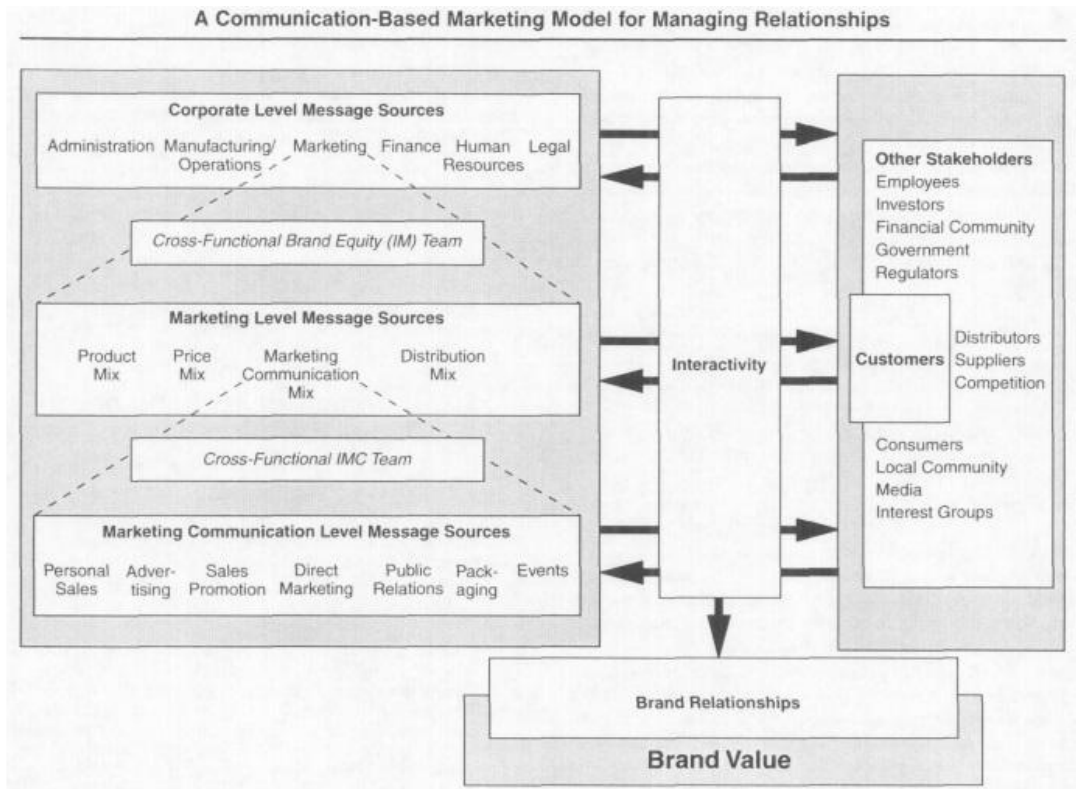


Figure 4. The communications-based marketing model (Duncan & Moriarty 1998)

The corporate level focus in the model places more emphasis on relationships than transactions. The communication should reach both the customers and the stakeholders, since by doing this, it is less likely that conflicting messages are sent to different groups. Brand messages sent will remain strategically consistent. This level also facilitates purposeful dialogue between customers and other stakeholders. Cross-functional management is needed to plan and follow messages for strategic consistency and inconsistency and this must already begin at the corporate level. The marketing level focuses on the actual service, making sure that the messages regarding the actual services are communicated consistently. This includes the pricing and distribution. The marketing communication level, which is the main focus, delivers messages to a wider audience. The messages must be consistent with the corporate and marketing levels and ultimately the marketing communications level must make sure that the strategy is followed. All levels must be integrated to systematically deliver the same message to the customers and stakeholders across all channels. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998)

The communications-based marketing model stresses the need for cross-functional organization. Marketing the service is not just done in one level, but all of the levels and in a consistent manner. Cross-functional management not only breaks down the walls

between the levels and the groups but also helps with learning from the feedback and encourages shared learning. Since marketing is of a social and associational nature, it depends on relationships. The well-planned communication attracts customers and helps to keep them and other shareholders. The model builds brand value through cross-functional planning and identifies the messages between them. (Duncan & Moriarty 1998) It takes the whole organization to make the strategy work.

2.4 Strategy Gaps Model of Service Quality

The strategy gaps model of service quality is an integrated and structured way to view the delivery of service quality. The model positions strategies, key concepts and decisions in a manner that it builds ways to close the gap between customer expectations and perceptions. It provides a framework for delivering service excellence and customer-driven service innovation and fits well into the needs and targets of the alumni relations program. What the model does is show that the primary goal should be to meet or even exceed the customer expectation and the strategies used to achieve the objectives should be focusing on the customer, in this case the alumni. The central focuses of the model are the gaps, which are the differences between customer expectations (i.e. what the alumni expect from the program) of what will be delivered and perceptions of the service as it is actually delivered. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

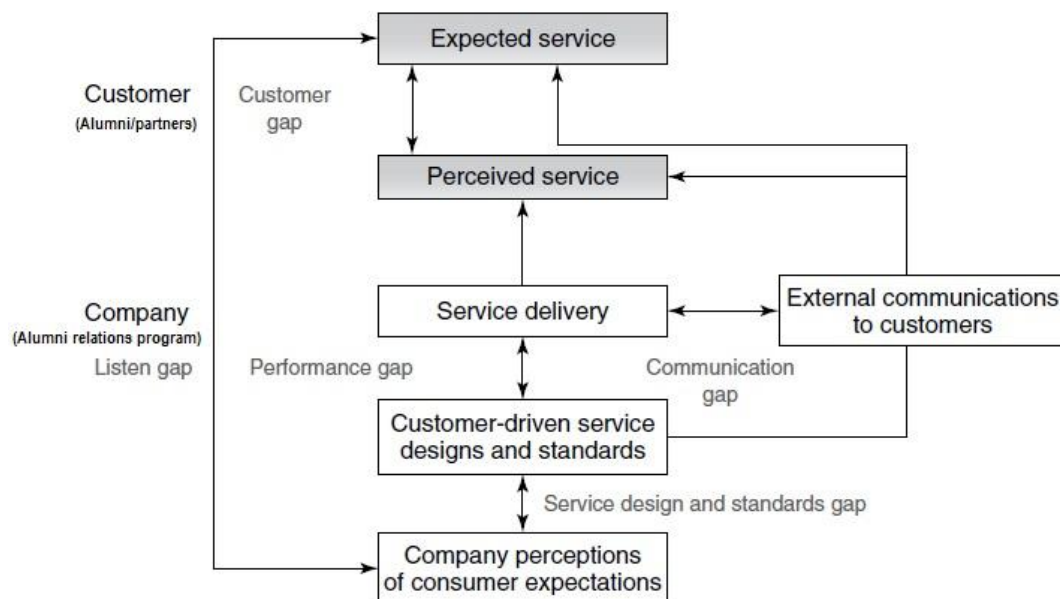


Figure 5. Gaps model of service quality (modified from source Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

The main focus of the model, since it concentrates on the services sector, is the customer gap. The model suggests that by closing this gap through matching or even exceeding customer expectation, the service provider will achieve service quality from the customer perspective. Service quality itself has been studied extensively and five dimensions have been identified. The same dimensions are also captured in SERVQUAL, a questionnaire consisting of a total of 21 items measuring these dimensions. While SERVQUAL itself is out of the scope of this Master's Thesis, it might be a useful way to measure service quality after the alumni relations program has been established for some time. The dimensions themselves, however, are applicable in this Master's Thesis. First of these dimensions is assurance, which means that the customer is assured of the knowledge and courtesy of the employees and hence, inspired to trust them. The second dimension is empathy, meaning that customers are provided with caring, individualized attention. The third dimension is reliability, which means that the service provider is able to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. The fourth dimension is responsiveness, meaning the service provider's willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. The fifth and last dimension is tangibles, which means the physical appearance of communication materials. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

The other four gaps are known as the provider gaps and they are 1) listening gap, 2) service design and standards gap, 3) performance gap and 4) the communication gap. The provider gaps are considered to be the underlying causes behind the customer gap. The model suggests that the customer gap is a function of one or more of these provider gaps. The listening gap is the difference between customer expectations and company understanding of those expectations. There are several reasons why a listening gap can form, for example the service provider may not directly interact with customers or may not have the tools to address the expectations. For example, in the alumni relations program, the alumni might not ever have direct communication with the alumni coordinator. In order to close this gap, the service provider must acquire accurate information about the customer expectations. This can be done, for example, through a questionnaire such as the alumni survey I have conducted and will go deeper into in the next chapter. Closing the listening gap also requires a relationship between the provider and customer in which the provider understands and meets the customer needs over time. This relationship can also be virtual. Another way to close the gap is to for the provider to know and act on what the customers expect even when they ex-

perience a service failure. For example, if the provider would charge a yearly fee and a customer stops paying, the provider should act and seek information on why the customer was not satisfied with the service. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010) Service recovery is important, since recapturing customers is always harder than recruiting new ones (Duncan & Moriarty 1998).

The second provider gap is the decision and standards gap. While closing the listening gap is necessary, it alone is not sufficient in achieving service excellence. The second gap will address how to translate what the customer expects into actual service designs and developing a way to measure the services against these expectations. In order to close the decision and standards gap, the provider must employ well-defined innovation practices and new service development. This could mean building a well-defined process, which engages customers along the way and carefully planning and prototyping the service implementation. The service provider must also understand the overall customer experience through service blueprinting, which means considering everything that happens from the moment the customer engages the service until the service is delivered. The entire life cycle of the service must be taken into consideration. The service provider should also measure service operation through customer-defined standards. This means that the approach should be through the customer perspective, rather than the company-defined standards. In order to close the design and standards gap, the situation should be seen through the eyes of the customer. The final strategy which closes the decision and standards gap is the incorporation of physical evidence in service design. This includes everything tangible such as brochures, internet presence and facilities. These, especially the internet presence have a potentially powerful influence on the customer experience. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

The third provider gap is the performance gap, which should be closed to make sure there is no inconsistency between the service design and standards and the actual service delivery. Service performance is never a certainty and the standards to achieve quality service performance must be backed by appropriate resources, including people and technology. The standards should also be enforced in order for them to be effective. This can be done through measuring and rewarding employee performance. If standards are not measured or supported, they are no good and service performance cannot be expected to follow. Narrowing the performance gap should be done by ensuring that all the resources needed to achieve the service standards are in place. The gap can be narrowed or even closed by aligning the human resource practices such as

hiring, training, supporting and rewarding around delivering service excellence. The employees delivering the services should have two complementary capacities: service competencies and service inclination in order to achieve the best performance. The customers' roles should be defined in order for them to be understood by the employees, who then can work effectively to meet expectations. Technology that facilitates the efforts made by the provider is needed. It should be integrated effectively and appropriately in order to achieve service excellence. It can also serve as a substitute for employees by delivering the service to the customer without any human interaction. This type of service is called self-service technology. In addition to having the necessary technology at their disposal, the employees should be motivated to perform the service according to the established standards. The services also need to synchronize demand and capacity. When funding is tight, it should also be made sure that the capacity is not underutilized. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

The last provider gap is the communication gap. It focuses on the difference between the actual service delivery and what is communicated to the customers. The challenge is to pick the right communication channel or channels. The service provider must ensure that all these channels communicate effectively and consistently, which is a time consuming task, but essential to an integrated communication strategy. The strategy must be carried out by everything and everyone sending a message or a signal to the customer. Closing the communication gap also requires the customer expectations to be managed effectively throughout the service experience. While the external communication remains the most visible part in closing the communication gap, internal communication must also be taken into consideration in order to avoid for example overpromising. All the players in the strategy must be on the same page. What is also important is to manage the service brand by creating a strong brand image for the service. This will be reinforced by the brand slogans and logos, for example. A good brand image will reduce the communication gap since the consumer recognizes the service through it. Also, the pricing strategy of the services must be communicated clearly internally, in order for the customer to leave with the idea that they got value for the price they paid. Determining the value of the service to the customer can be complicated, but should be taken into consideration. (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler 2010)

3 Current State Analysis

3.1 Metropolia Strategy

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences opened in 2008 as merger of EVTEK and Stadia Universities of Applied Sciences and a part of Laurea, so as an institution and as a brand, Metropolia is relatively new. It is the largest university of applied sciences in Finland and operates in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Metropolia has 16 500 students in 67 degree programs, of which 15 are in English. Metropolia's staff includes 1080 people. The degree programs represent several different fields, for example business administration, technology, culture and health care and social services. (Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences - About n.d.)

Metropolia strategic objectives are:

- Services/product: Best education in Finland
- Operating processes: Flexible operating models that support renewability
- Development of the staff's know-how and wellbeing: the best workplace in the higher education sector in Finland
- Customers: Finland's highest pass rate
- Networking: Desirable strategic partner
- Impact: Providing competence and competent labor in the region
- Finances: Financial leeway in order to maintain the autonomy of the university of applied sciences (The Metropolia Way n.d.)

All of these strategic objectives should be taken into consideration when planning alumni activities, since the alumni relations program will represent Metropolia University of Applied Sciences as well the students and alumni. The alumni relations program should aim to be a desirable strategic partner and represent the best educated individuals and competent labor in Finland.

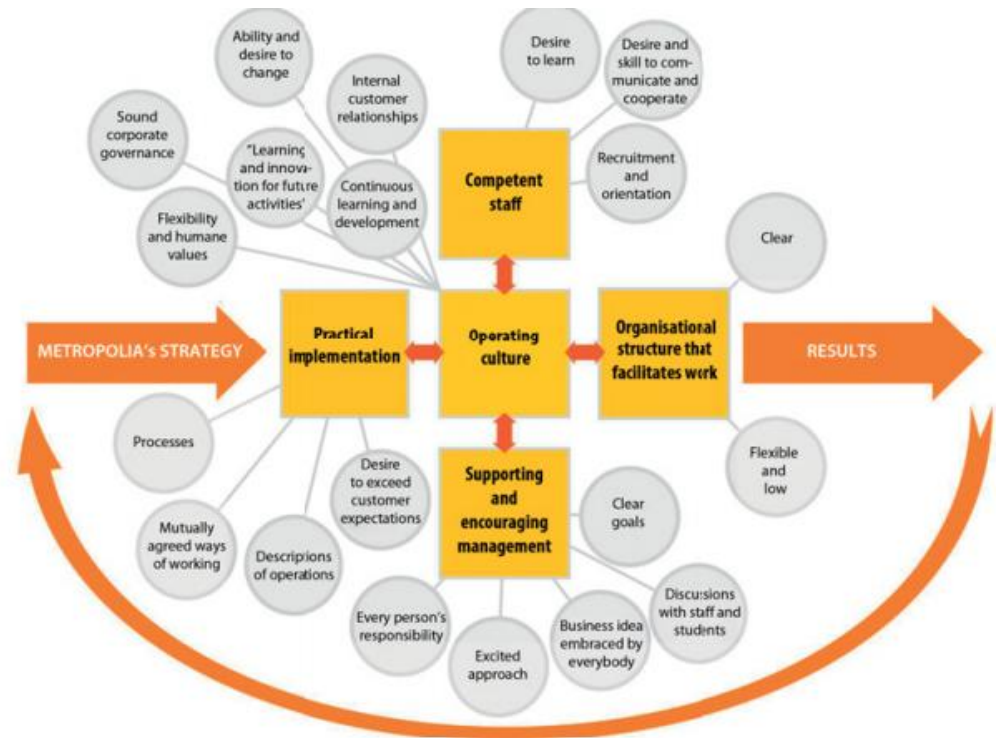


Illustration 1. The elements of high-quality and competitive operations at Metropolia. (Nohr, Joyce & Roberson 2003)

Figure 6. Metropolia's elements of operations (The Metropolia Way n.d.)

“Metropolia’s ambitious goal is that, by 2014, it has become the most esteemed university of applied sciences in Finland and a learning community with the best ability to renew itself. The degree programmes and courses offered are of high quality, and the graduates have versatile and international professional skills developed under the principle of lifelong learning. Carrying its responsibility for the future of the environment, Metropolia produces new solutions to the needs of workplaces and society at large as a result of its innovation activities in unimpeded and social learning environments. Metropolia aims to differentiate itself from other universities of applied sciences with high quality and new kinds of operating concepts. Metropolia promises to become known for its good atmosphere and a passion for doing things.” (The Metropolia Way n.d.)

3.2 Alumni Relations at Metropolia

As an organization, Metropolia alumni relations program is quite new, just like its host. The Metropolia Alumni Association, which now seems to be passive, was founded

soon after the actual university and the new alumni relations program was in the planning stage when this Master's Thesis was being written. Anyone who had graduated from Metropolia or its predecessors, for example Stadia or EVTEK, were welcomed to the Metropolia Alumni Association. The alumni relations program is equally open to all graduates. The Alumni Association has in the past provided services for graduate students such as variety of events, a magazine and different kind of discounts for the members. Their membership fee is a one-time payment of €15. (Alumni n.d.)

“By keeping in touch with the University of Applied Sciences alumni are informed about the current changes and research, different events and happenings and continuing studies.” (Alumni n.d.)

Since, as mentioned before, Metropolia UAS is the largest university of applied sciences in Finland with 16 500 students and 67 degree programs, the Alumni Association has an extremely diverse membership and this membership will also be the target audience of the alumni relations program. However, in the end of 2013 there were only c. 900 members in the Association. The membership fee was a onetime payment of 15€ and members were offered invites to events, Focus magazine from Metropolia UAS and discounts. The Association has been run on a voluntary basis from the beginning of 2014 and operations are being re-evaluated. (Ms Hakkarainen 2014, pers.comm). It has been, however, decided that Metropolia's alumni relations program will stand separate from the association. Metropolia itself has defined Metropolia's values as “high quality, community spirit, transparency and expertise.” (The Metropolia Way n.d.) These values are also applicable to the alumni relations program and also the association itself.

3.3 The Alumni Survey of 2013

A Metropolia alumni survey was conducted in 2013 in order to evaluate alumni functions. Due to limited resources this survey was only conducted in Finnish and hence not many international students took it. The survey was not highly popular as of the 73 people, who took the survey 78% were Metropolia employees and 22% were students.

The 2013 survey asked very specific questions regarding certain services, so a survey with more write-in answers was needed to map alumni attitudes.

3.4 The Alumni Survey of 2014

I developed my survey as a follow-up to the previous alumni survey with a slight focus on international students. In order to gain more perspective and collect ideas, this survey was made open to anyone that wanted to participate. It was aimed at reaching out to both students and the alumni. The survey invitations were sent on the Metropolia intranet, social media and some mailing lists. The survey was open from March 17th to 28st.

The survey was made short and simple in order to attract respondents. In order to gain maximum amount of answers, all students and alumni were permitted to take the survey. While interviewing my peers, I had noticed that not everyone knew what the word alumni means, a short description (“alumni (i.e those who have graduated)”) was added into the introduction of the survey. The survey itself was divided into four parts; background information, alumni association survey, development ideas for alumni association and open feedback. In the first part, respondents were asked to identify themselves by choosing their current educational status, their year of (expected) graduation, declaring the universities they had attended and answering whether they were an international student or not. In the second part, respondents were asked to about their attitudes towards alumni activities. The third part of the survey focused on mapping the expectations and funding issues related to alumni associations. The fourth part offered an open feedback space for the respondents, so that they could share thoughts provoked by the survey or alumni activities in general. To gain valuable insights write-in answer options were offered where applicable. Screen captions from the alumni survey can be found in appendix 1.

3.5 Results of the Alumni Survey of 2014

The survey was not very popular, which was to be expected, since the concept of alumni seemed to be relatively unknown. But this does not explain the lack of answers entirely. The survey was advertised on Metropolia Alumni LinkedIn group and out of 352 group members, only 13 alumni answered the survey. All in all, there were 30 responses, which are detailed in appendix 2. Here are the analyzed results of the survey.

3.5.1 Background Information

The first part for survey focused on getting background information of the survey-takers.

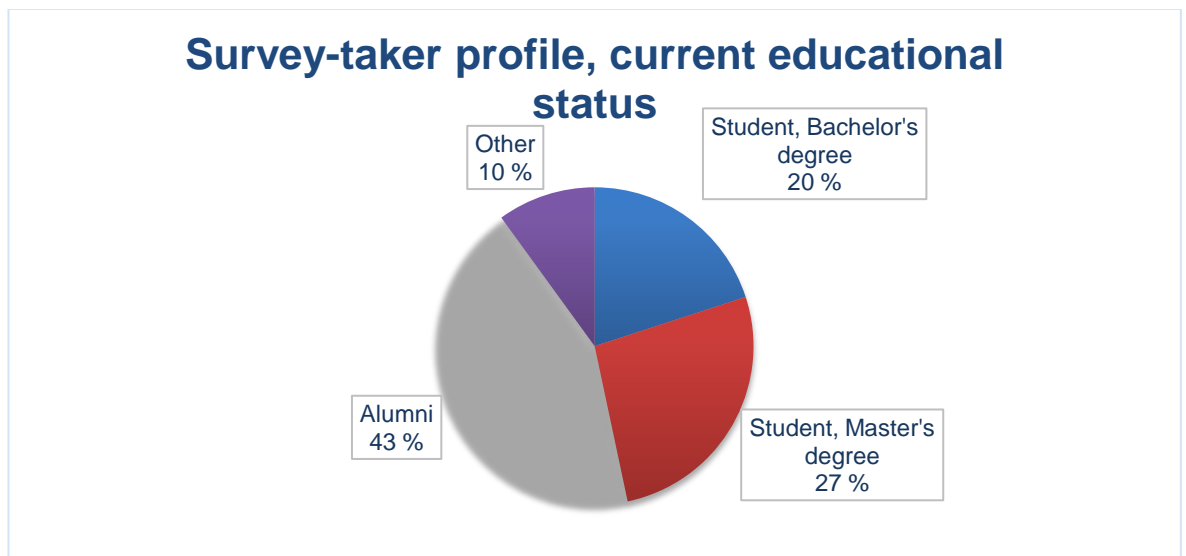


Chart 1. Current educational status. Relative majority of survey-takers were alumni (43 %), 27% were Master's degree students, 20% were Bachelor's degree students and 10% had chosen the option "Other". The option "Other" was added to the questionnaire in case the respondent was not sure of their status, since the concept of being alumni appeared not well known. It was indeed apparent from the results that the term alumni was not completely understood. Those who chose the option "Other" were clearly alumni, since they declared having graduated from a university. Couple of those survey-takers, who declared themselves as students, had also already graduated. The reason behind choosing to differentiate the educational level was to study, if there was a difference of interest in alumni issues between the bachelor's degree students and master's degree students. There did not seem to be a substantial difference.

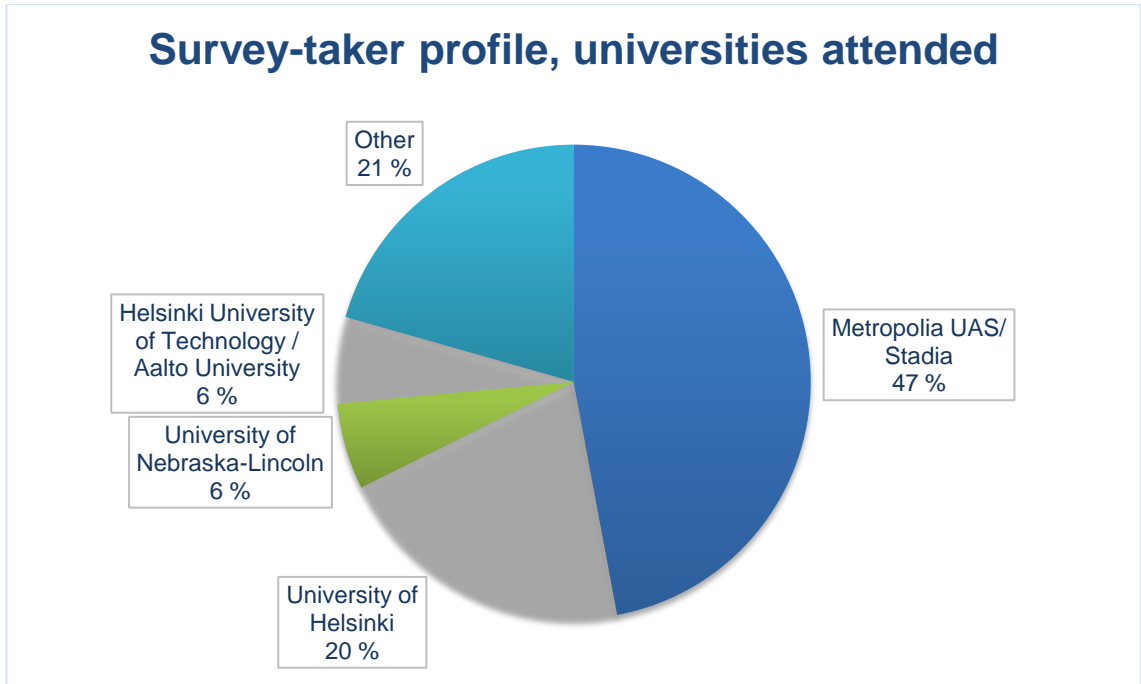


Chart 2. As expected, majority of the survey-takers were either students or alumni of Metropolia UAS. I have placed those universities, which had only been mentioned once, into the “Other” category. These universities included University of Oulu, Liverpool Hope University, Haaga-Helia, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Modesto Jr College, The University of Manchester and University of Vermont.

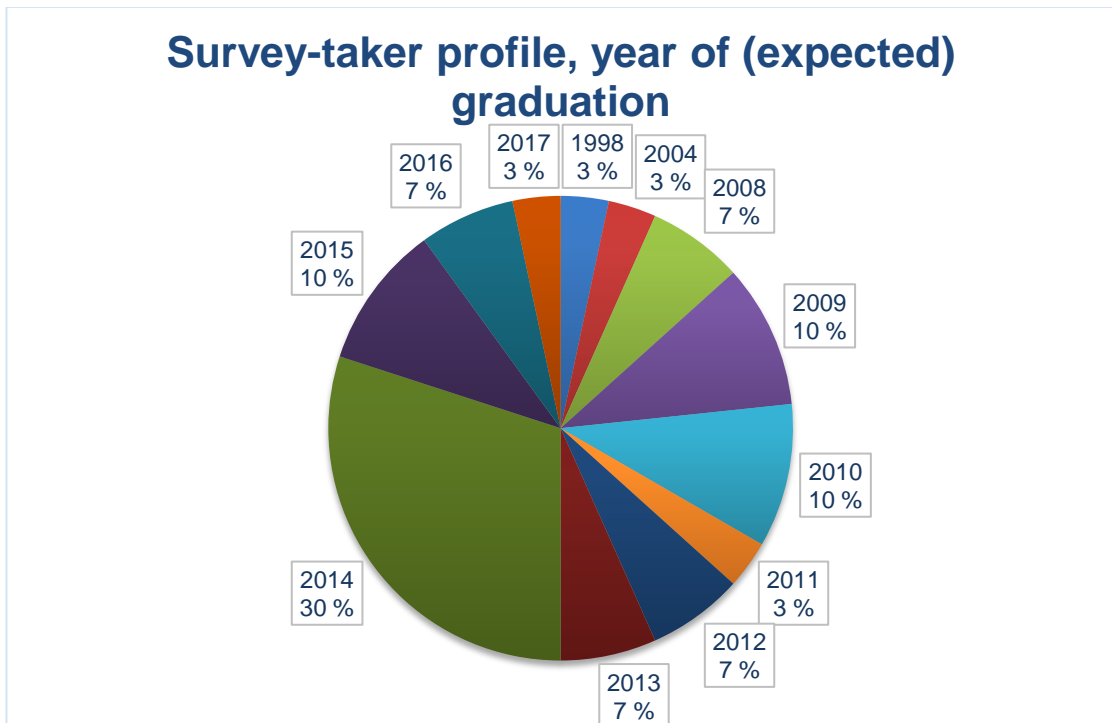


Chart 3. One third of the survey-takers had graduated or expected to graduate this year. This means the recent graduates were more interested in alumni activities.

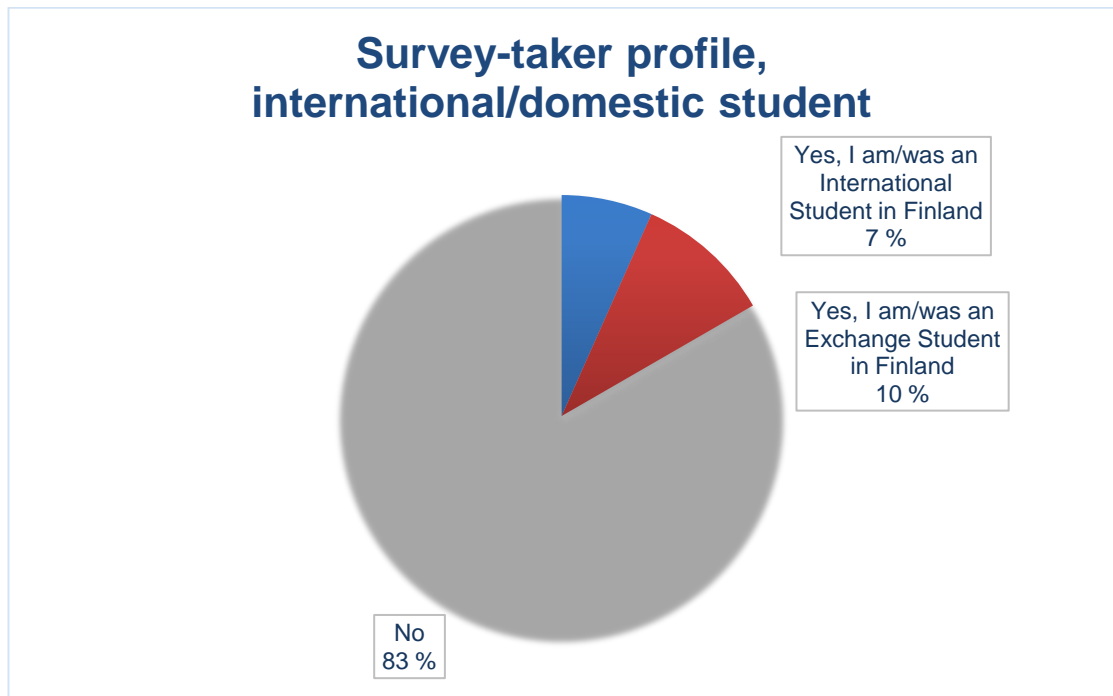


Chart 4. Majority of the survey takers were domestic students. Despite the survey being advertised in social media channels aimed at international students, only a fraction of the survey-takers were international students. It appears that international students either had very little interest in alumni issues or saw no value in alumni associations.

3.5.2 Alumni Association Survey

The second part of the survey focused on mapping the attitudes towards alumni association.

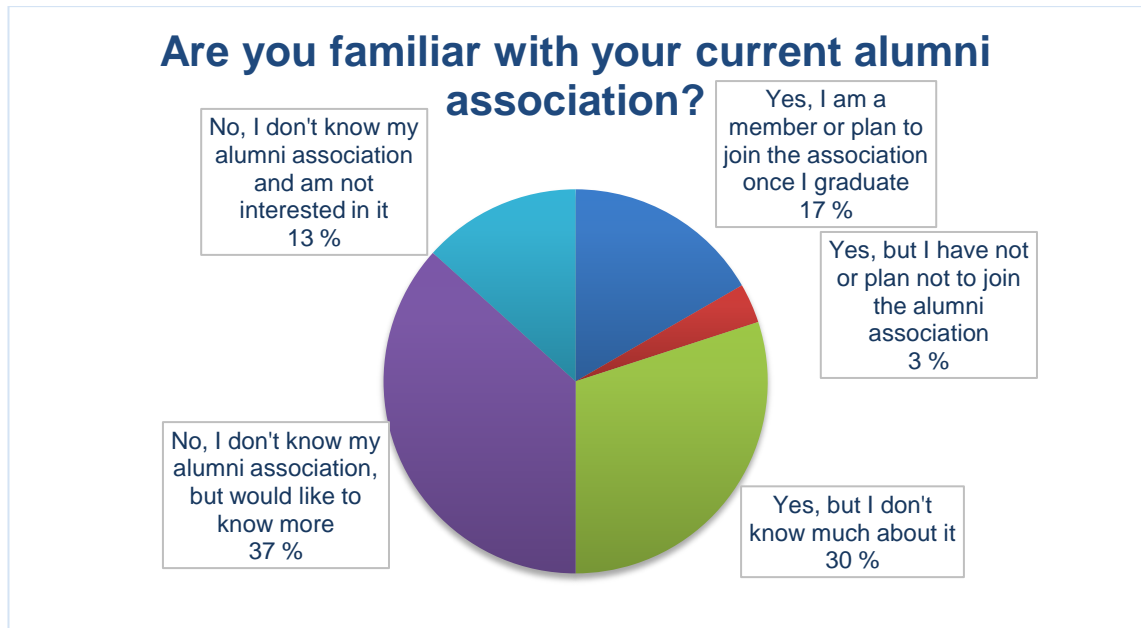


Chart 5. Survey-takers were in general not familiar with their alumni association. There is a definite interest towards alumni associations; majority (37 %) of the survey-takers didn't know their alumni association, but would like to know more. 30% of the survey-taker were familiar with the alumni association, but did not know much about it. 17% of the survey takers either were members or planned to join their association. Only a small minority (3%) of the survey takers were familiar with their association and still were not interested in it. Only one survey-taker specified why they were not interested in the alumni association, stating that "it's useless." Based on these findings, the alumni association is not very well known, but there is definite interest towards the association.

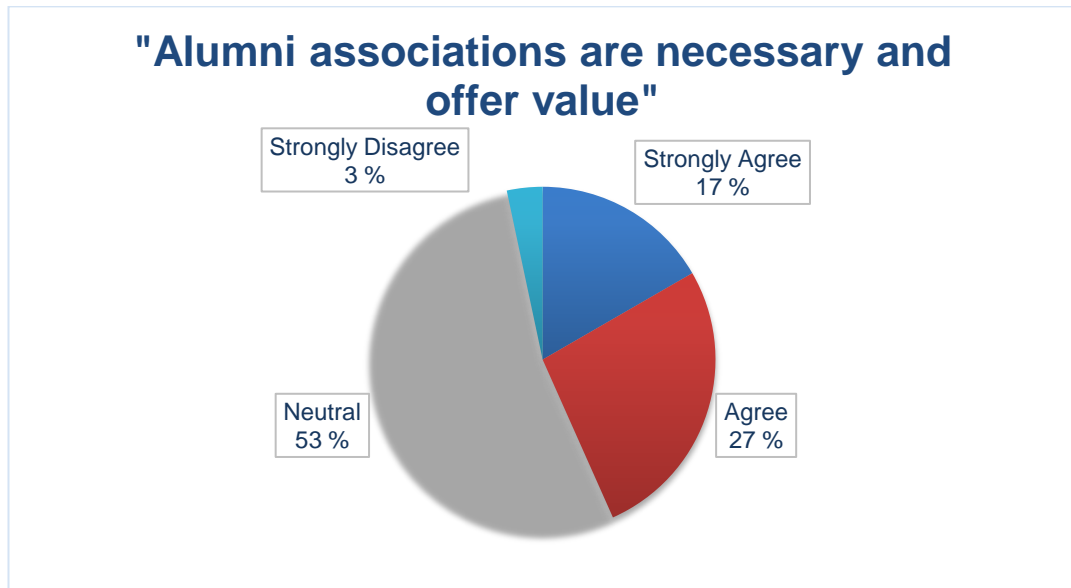


Chart 6. Majority (53%) of the survey-takers took a neutral stance when it came to evaluate the necessity and value of alumni associations. This result further supports the hypothesis the function of an alumni association is not very well known in Finland. The attitude towards the alumni associations was, however, positive; 44% of the survey takers either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that alumni associations are necessary and offer value. Only one survey-taker “strongly disagreed” with this statement and none of the survey-takers “disagreed.”

The last question in this part of the survey was “what are the main functions of an alumni association?” This was an optional write-in question and 80% of the survey-takers had answered it. The answers mentioned the following functions: networking, building a sense of community, provide business contacts, events, offering discounts, peer support, fundraising, gain publicity to the university, help with finding jobs for both students and alumni and maintain a connection between the university and students/alumni. Some of the survey-takers wrote that they do not know what the function of an alumni association is. The function mentioned most often was networking, which is indeed one of the most important functions of the alumni relations program.

3.5.3 Development Ideas for the Alumni Association

The third part of the survey focused on mapping the expectations both the students and the alumni had towards the association. Interest in the funding options were surveyed as well.

The first question was a write-in section, where the respondents were asked “In your opinion, what services should an alumni association offer?” As background, the respondents were given the following information: “The Metropolia Alumni Association currently offers invites to events, Focus magazine from Metropolia UAS and discounts.” This question was optional and 63% of the respondents had answered the question. Most of the answers were relating to networking and career services. Different kind of events, newsletters, lectures, workshops, seminars, online forums for discussions, tutor/mentor services were suggested. Some offered practical answers such as university email address, organizing visits to companies and file storage service. Some answered that the current ones sounded good (events, magazine and discounts). All in all the respondents asked for more networking events and some more social events.

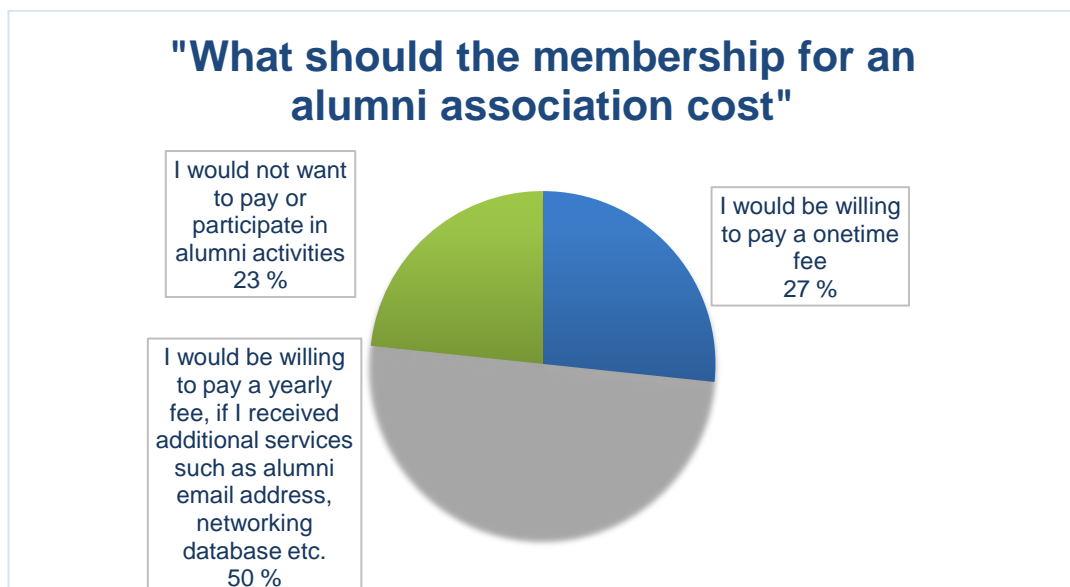


Chart 7. A clear majority of the respondents would be willing to pay to participate in alumni activities. 27% of the respondents would be willing to pay a onetime fee and 50% of the respondents would be willing to pay a yearly fee, if they received additional activities. 23% of the respondents would not want to pay for alumni activities.

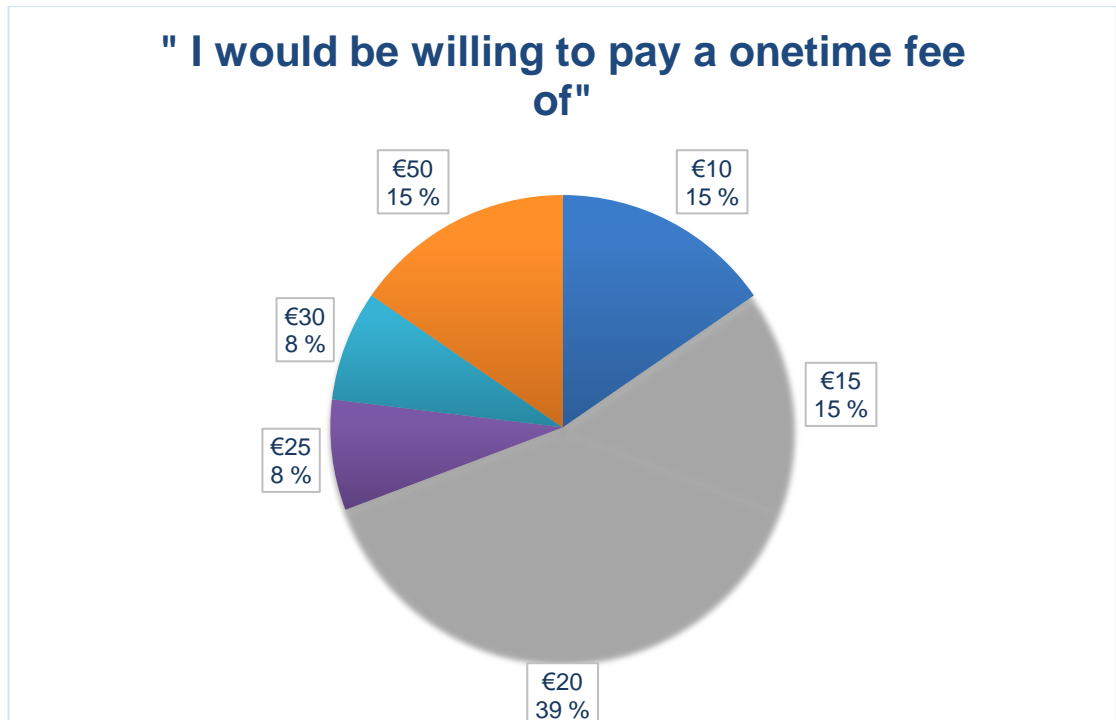


Chart 8. The respondents, who were willing to pay a onetime fee suggested fees between 10-50€. A onetime fee of €20 was suggested the most.

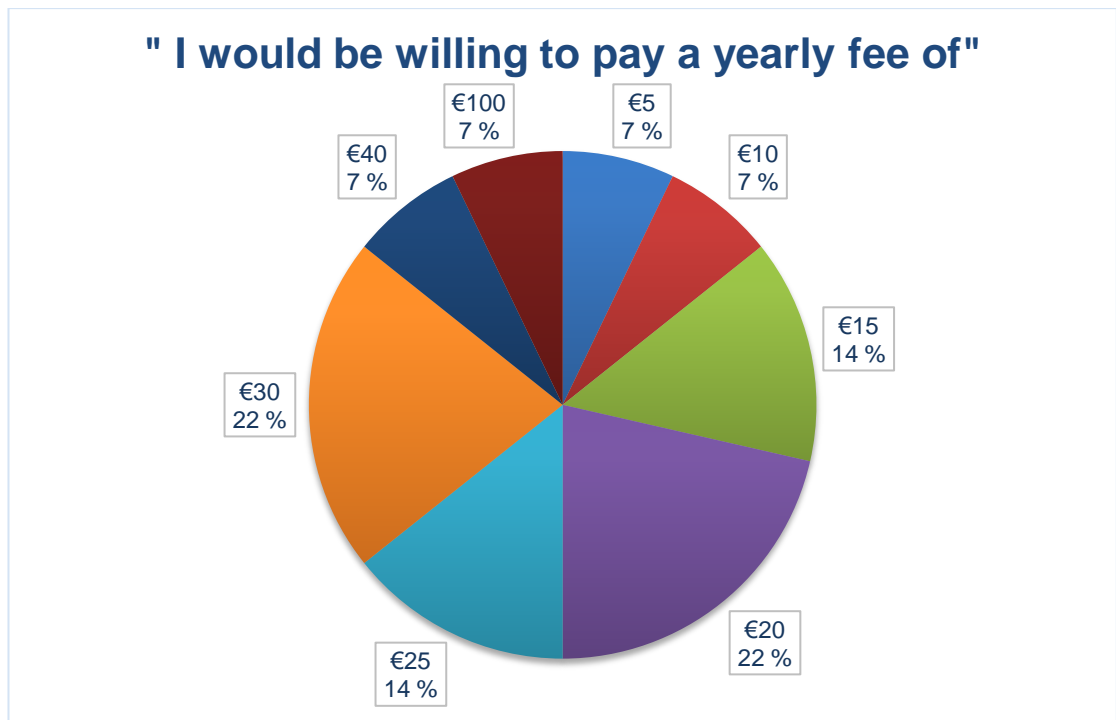


Chart 9. The respondents, who were willing to pay a yearly fee suggested fees between 5-100€. A yearly fee of 20€ and 30€ were suggested the most.

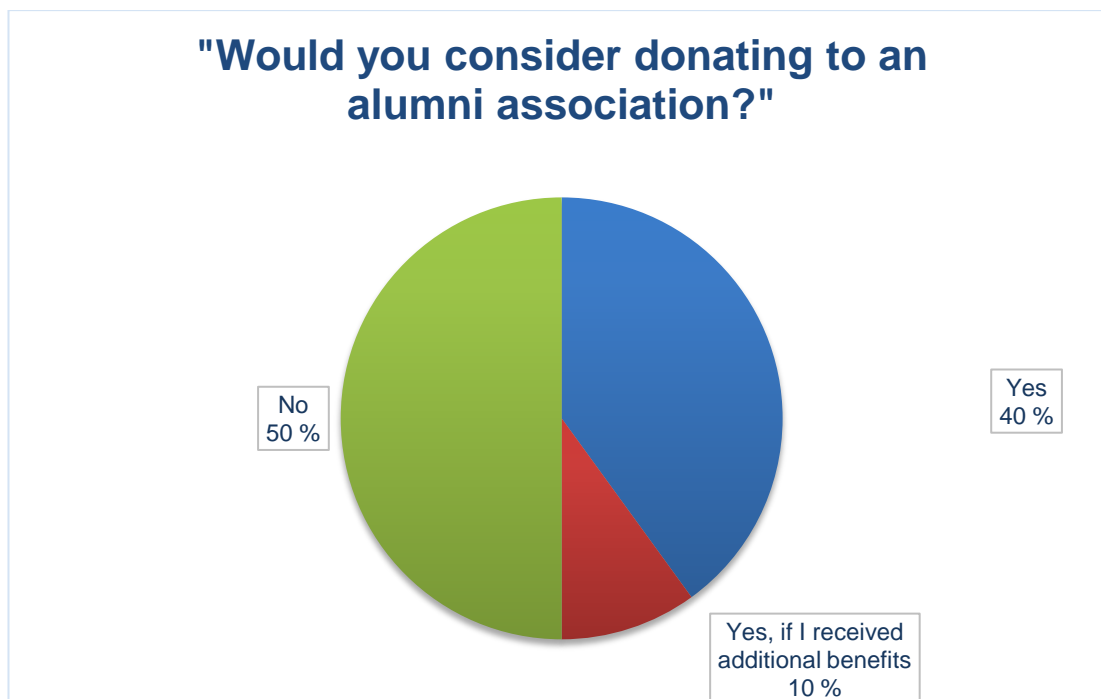


Chart 10. Half of the respondents would be interested in donating to alumni association. One fifth of those interested in donating would expect to receive additional benefits. In the next question, the respondents were asked which benefits would be necessary in order for them to donate. An example of “honorary mentions in magazines, trophies, certificates, name plaques in buildings etc.” was given. The respondents agreed with the suggestion and added alumni mentoring program, seminars and meetings especially for those who donated. One respondent suggested a free five year membership to those who donate. One respondent wrote that all of the benefits mentioned in the example would be good, but they would like to know where exactly the money is going. One respondent answered that “a mention should be enough, anything else is an ego trip” and another wrote “no benefits, just good enough reason to do it”.

3.5.4 Open Feedback

In the last section of the survey, the respondents were asked to write comments as open feedback. Six respondents chose to write an answer. One respondent suggested that the association and its benefits should be marketed more in both Finnish and English. One respondents felt like resources should not be wasted in big events, the funds should be directed to online services instead. Two respondents were concerned about getting calls for them to donate, since they would not have money to donate. One respondent suggested organized activities and possible investments as the “budget sup-

port” for the association. Another respondent saw no purpose for an alumni association.

3.6 The Current State of Metropolia Alumni Activities

Besides these two surveys I also contacted Metropolia Alumni Relations Coordinator Milla Hakkarainen and had a meeting with the Head of Metropolia Communications Liisa Salo and Communications Specialist Melissa Rask. Based on these contacts and the two surveys, I have analyzed the current state through SWOT for internal issues and PESTEL for external issues. SWOT analysis was chosen due to its simplicity as a marketing strategy tool; it’s a viable tool when making a development plan that includes marketing. (Ferrell & Hartline 2012)

Strengths: There is definite interest in developing the alumni activities and Alumni Relations Coordinator Milla Hakkarainen is dedicated to the issue. Based on the surveys and interviews there appears to very little to none negative prejudices towards alumni work, so the customer base i.e students and alumni are available to be engaged in alumni work. As a new service, the Metropolia alumni work is a “tabula rasa” and there are no obstacles to develop the activities. This is a definite strength, since there are no “mental” limitations to proceed with the planning and developing of the activities.

Weaknesses: While the parties might be enthusiastic in developing alumni activities, the current state of the actual alumni work appears to be unorganized. Also, the funding is extremely limited. The current alumni association does not seem very active and from the discussions that I had with the Metropolia Communications team I understood that they plan on standing separate from the Metropolia’s alumni relations program. This is a definite weakness as together the two entities, university and association, would be much more efficient. Also, the target audience will find the current situation confusing and might hence not bother joining neither Metropolia’s alumni activities nor the association.

Opportunities: as a new concept, the alumni work at Metropolia has plenty of opportunities. The university should see the alumni, the program’s customers, as ‘the return on investment’. (Gasman & Bowman, 2013) After graduation the alumni physically leave the university, but come back as customers and offer opportunities as members of the work force. Some like the international students only return virtually, but they present

opportunities from abroad. The alumni themselves offer countless opportunities when it comes to giving back to the university. They might donate or volunteer their time and this should be seen as an opportunity. The key phrase in alumni work is 'reach out and engage', which is where the opportunities lie. Metropolia must reach the target audience and keep them engaged in the alumni work in order to be sustainable. Social media will provide an excellent tool for this. (Wankel & Wankel 2011) There is also great potential in gathering business partners from the corporate world, some through the alumni.

Threats: The unlikely situation where the Metropolia alumni work team and the alumni association would start to compete with each other can be seen as a very improbable threat. The association is not part of the Metropolia operations and stands separately. However, if the two entities miscommunicate or otherwise collide, both parties are most likely to suffer and hence this lack of cooperation can be considered a threat. Another type of threat is the competition from other universities and their alumni associations. Some students have graduated from two or more institutions and will probably only be active in one alumni association or program. The alumni are likely to choose the university with the stronger brand to which they feel more connected to and comprehensive alumni relations program.

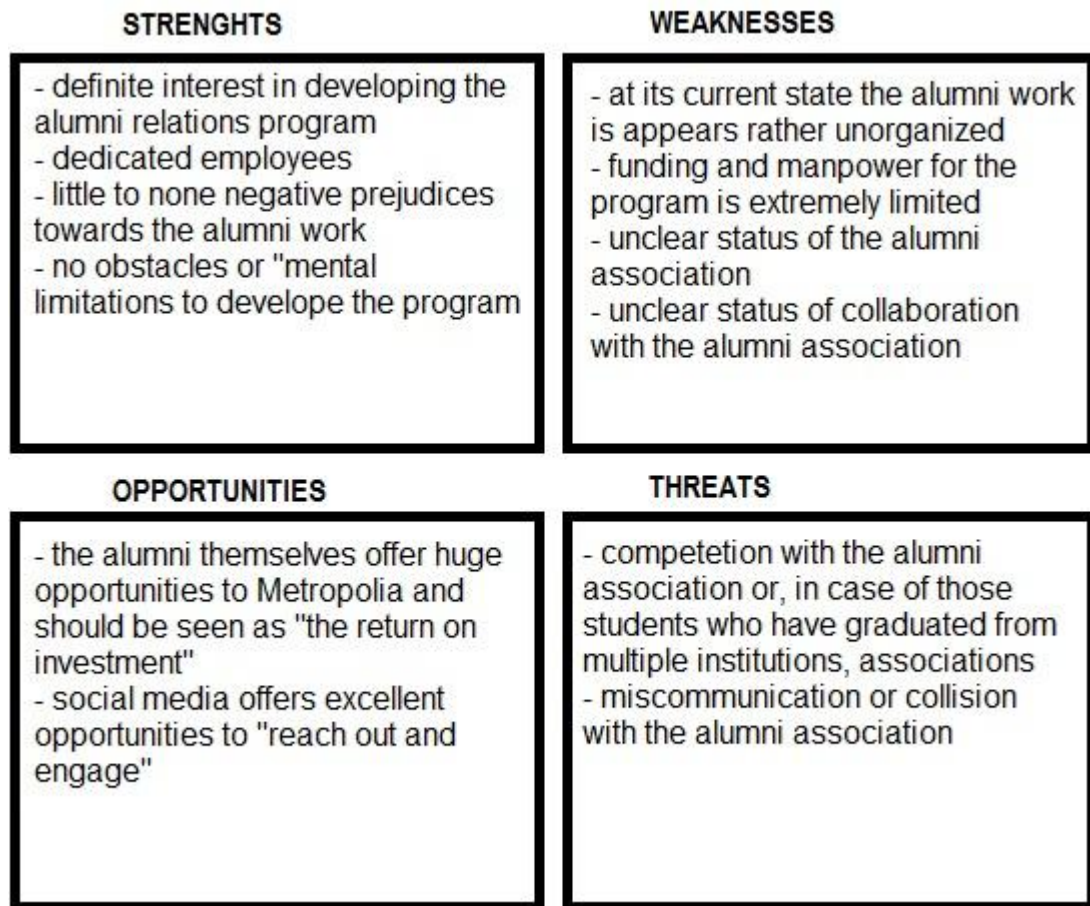


Figure 7. Summary of SWOT analysis

Political: The universities of applied sciences in Finland like Metropolia are publicly funded and operate under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The core funding Metropolia comes from the city of Helsinki (58,11%) and the government (41,89%). The Ministry of Education and Culture also grants some funding for the development of operations and to certain expenditures. (Ammattikorkeakoulujen Rehtorineuvosto n.d.) Most of the alumni activity funding comes from these sources as is dependent on the political decisions regarding education. Since public funding has been declining and Metropolia has been forced to lay off people, the current state of the funding from public sources is scarce.

Economic: Since Metropolia's funding comes from the public sector, short time economic fluctuations do not affect funding as much as in the private sector. However, during a longer term financial crisis the public funding for universities will most likely be reduced and programs that are not seen as having a direct impact on student, like the alumni program, are most likely the first to suffer. Also, if being part of the alumni pro-

gram will charge a yearly membership fee, economic instability might make some members not renew their membership, if they come across financial difficulties. On the other hand, the need for alumni career services will increase during economic hardship, since those who have lost their job or have just graduated and are having difficulties securing a job, could turn to alumni services in order to find employment.

Social: Attitudes towards alumni work are changing in Finland, since the concept of what is alumni is becoming more known. This will have a positive effect on alumni work since interest towards the possibilities of being a member of an alumni association or taking part in alumni activities can increase. Also the increasing importance of networking could convince the alumni to look into more networking possibilities offered by Metropolia.

Technological: The development of social media and online technologies in general can offer new methods for alumni work to reach the alumni. For example those alumni, who are outside of Finland and cannot participate physically in alumni activities, will benefit from these technological advancements. New ways of communication virtually offer more possibilities especially for the international alumni, but also to those alumni who do not live in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The concept of “virtual alumni” will be possible through the online technology.

Environmental: While alumni work is mostly an intangible service, the growing interest in the environmental factors should also be taken into consideration when planning communication channels. For example, the need for paper version of an alumni newsletter should be evaluated and alumni events should be made “green.” Since Metropolia has an Environmental Engineering program, being environmentally conscious can be a marketing tool as well.

Legal: It is clear that all Metropolia alumni work must be done according to rules and regulations. Since my survey showed interest from the alumni in donating, the legal aspect of receiving and giving donations should be studied carefully and the alumni should be made aware of, for example, the possible tax issues that come with donating money. Donating money should be made as effortless to the alumni as possible, which means that the receiving end, either the association or Metropolia, should take care of the legal side of things. The alumni should also be informed if there are legal changes in the degrees, for example if they need certifications etc.

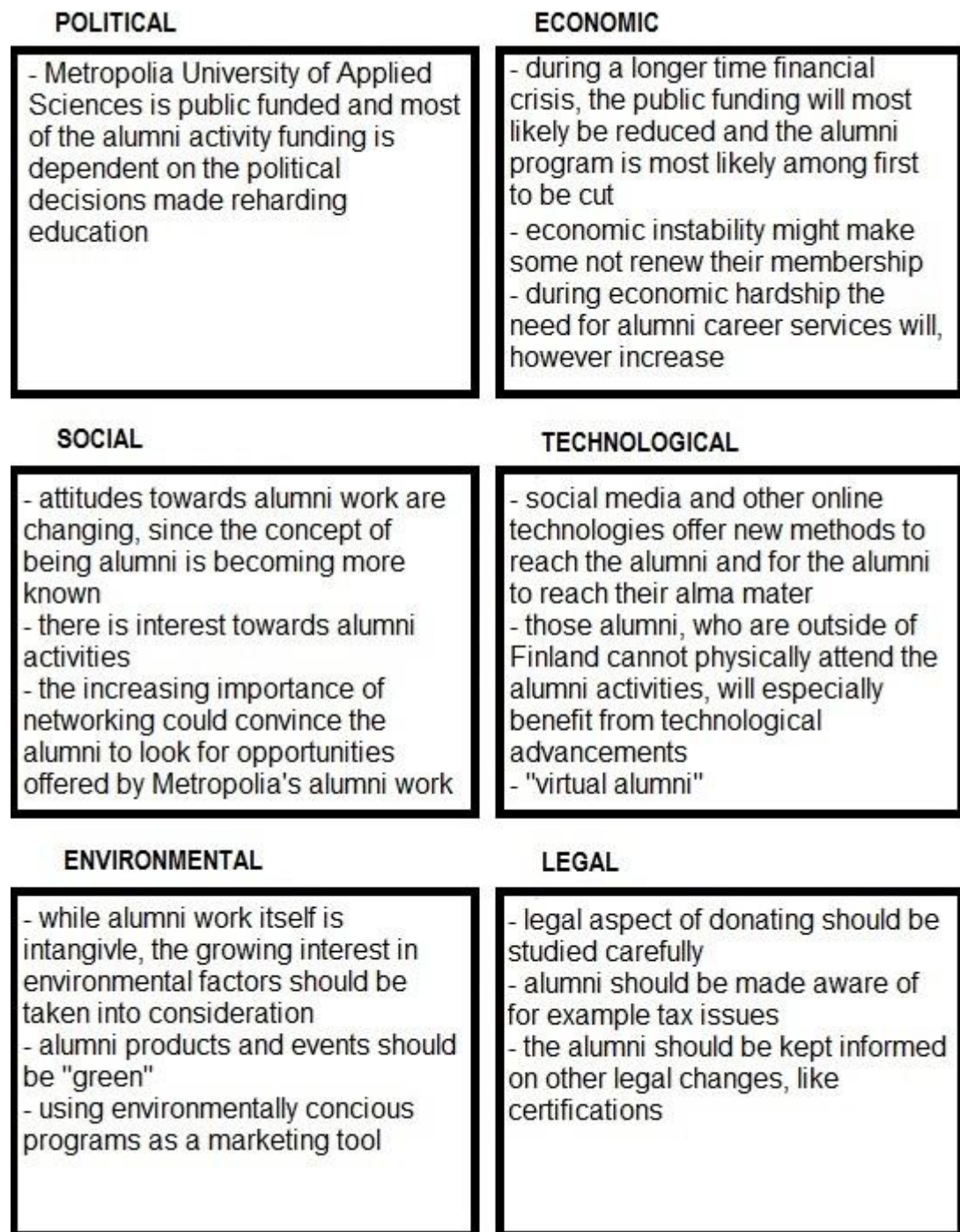


Figure 8. Summary of PESTEL analysis

The current state analysis shows that the Metropolia Alumni Association appears to function in a very limited way if at all. I was not able to contact Tuukka Männistö, the chairperson of the association, so the current state of the actual association is up in the air. Metropolia alumni activities are also rather inactive, but there are plans to improve

them through the Alumni Relations Coordinator Milla Hakkarainen. She has for example done a prezi presentation on the plans, where she introduces several new features such as an alumni registry and an alumni portal, both sound excellent steps towards an active alumni relations program. (Hakkarainen, 2014). Christina Kaarni has created a theoretical plan for this change in her Master's Thesis (Kaarni 2014), so a more practical approach is needed.

4 Objectives of the Development Plan

One of the first steps in creating a successful alumni relations program is to have alumni who are aware that they are in fact alumni. When I explained my Master's Thesis topic at my current work place, there was some confusion over what exactly my research was about. My co-worker told me that his alma mater, Aalto University, approached him through a telephone call and started their call addressing him as an alumnus. Immediately, he was taken aback and said that he had not agreed to be an alumnus, since he was under the impression that alumni are paying members of some association or another. After this discussion, I did a quick interview survey of my work place and found out that many of my colleagues were not familiar with the word "alumni" and did in fact assume that being an alumnus meant that one was part of some club. Most of my co-workers graduated from a university of applied sciences and they had never heard of an alumni association or an alumni relations program. Both my research and survey results also clearly show that there is some confusion over the concept of being alumni. This must be addressed in order to create sustainable alumni relations program.

Alumni work is not only about reaching out to the alumni, but it also includes future alumni i.e. the current students. While researching the alumni work in Finland, I noticed that many Finnish universities consider only graduated students important to alumni work. In order for alumni work to reach its fullest potential, recruiting alumni and the alumni work in general must begin the day the student is accepted to study at that particular university, since that is when the community and relationship building begins. One cannot stress the importance of new student orientation; a good orientation will assist the student both during their studies and also after graduation. An alumni relations program should have a strong presence in the new student's life from day one. This means that the program representatives should start their work during orientation fairs and explain to new students that the alumni relations program is there to help them in their post-university life by offering the expertise and assistance of the alumni network. In order for the alumni activities to appear attractive to students, they must have a clear idea about the benefits of being a part of the program or being an active alumni in general from early on. This will create a sense of belonging, which in turn will help to make both students and alumni willing to contribute and share. It is obvious from the results of my survey that many graduating students and even alumni are not

aware of how being an alumnus or being a part of the program could be beneficial for them and the university.

Based on my findings, neither the alumni relations programs, alumni associations, nor the concept of being an alumnus are very well known, but there is definite interest towards being an active alumni and what alumni work can offer. In order to create a sustainable and functional alumni relations program, a clear service marketing strategy is needed. In order for this strategy to work, all functions of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences must work together in order to create both a marketing campaign as well as the program itself.

5 Tactics: Suggestions for Developing the Metropolia Alumni Relations Program

The first step in developing the alumni relations program is to analyze what the alumni relations program is doing. What is the alumni relations program's mission? In a nutshell, it is to provide services to the alumni and marketing the university through the alumni. It could also include fundraising, which I will address later in this Master's Thesis.

In order to find the best practices for the alumni relations program, I have isolated a few general steps that the program manager(s) should take. Since the alumni are now rather scattered, the first step in organizing the alumni should be to build a comprehensive alumni database. An alumni program is only as good as the membership database. Other immediate steps taken should be determining the best ways to communicate with the alumni and begin communicating with the alumni on a regular basis. Since alumni programs are long-term in nature, expectations should be managed and the steps mentioned should be carefully considered to reflect the changes in technology and university structure. (Alumni Marketing 2009) The latter is extremely important in the case of Metropolia, since the university itself has gone through several organizational changes and some alumni are uncertain whether or not they belong to Metropolia due to the name changes. Reconnecting with the alumni will be challenging and must be planned carefully. The limited funding also underlines the importance of long-term plans; reorganizing the alumni activities again in a few years might not be financially possible.

The questions to be answered when benchmarking the alumni relations program are similar to those of the advertisement message test. (Kotler 2013) What is the main message that the alumni should get from the program? What does the program want the alumni to know, believe or do? How likely is it that promoting the program will influence the alumni to know, believe or do? What works well in the alumni program and what works poorly? How does the program information make the alumni feel? Where is the best place to reach the alumni with information about the program: where would the alumni be most likely to notice and pay attention to the information?

Best practices take a look at the consistency of the program with the institution's role and mission (Offerman 2007). The main message of the alumni relations program

should be that as united and proud Metropolia alumni, the alumni can receive both professional and social benefits. As defined by Metropolia themselves, they are “the most esteemed university of applied sciences in Finland,” (The Metropolia Way n.d.) and they provide competence and competent labor in the region. Metropolia’s degrees will be more valued, when their school is made more known through its alumni. This will have a direct impact on their careers as Metropolia graduates. Social benefits are intertwined with professional benefits as networking socially can promote both a career as well as personal life. The alumni relations program wants the alumni to know and believe their status as well educated degree holders.

Best practices also address the delivery of adequate information: (Offerman 2007) the alumni are informed and know that being a Metropolia alumnus is a status to be proud of and a status that should be used to one’s advantage in the job markets. The program should want the alumni to spread the word of their prestigious education and degree value. For this reason, the alumni relations program should focus on keeping the alumni aware of changes in the institution as well as offering support in promoting their alma mater. In my opinion it is likely that investing in the alumni relations program will influence the alumni to do so. As can be seen from the results of the survey, the current alumni seem to have only a very vague idea of their status as Metropolia alumni. By strengthening this image through promoting the program and the core values and goals of Metropolia mentioned in the previous chapter, the value of the degree will be enhanced in the eyes of the alumni. Through the promotion of the program and the alumni brand itself the alumni can see the benefits of being a prestigious alumnus of Metropolia. Since many of the alumni are in management or even higher positions, they are likely to consider this in their recruitment processes and hire more Metropolia alumni, which in turn will make the degree even more prestigious and desirable. The practical step to achieve the goal is to create a campaign with clear achievable targets. This would be a short term pilot campaign, which would give an idea about how many alumni the program is reaching and also get an idea of their engagement level. A clear call to action to the alumni is needed to get them activated. This pilot campaign, a benchmarking test, also gives an idea of what to improve on and how to create a larger strategy.

What then works well in the alumni relations program and what works poorly? While the practical results would be received through the pilot campaign, the basic facts are these: Metropolia is a great university to graduate from and produces exceptional

alumni every year. The customer base for the program is easily narrowed and available. However, the communication is where the alumni relations program needs to focus on, since there is always room for improvement in any communications practices. The alumni need to be educated about and made aware of both their status and the alumni relations program itself. The program has to convince the alumni of its relevancy.

(Alumni Association Funding Models: Summary Findings from 20 Universities 2010)

The introduction of any new program inside the university is an interest to alumni, and they should be informed about changes as well as engaged in the decision-making process, if possible. (Offerman 2007) The alumni are the most direct contacts that the university has to the working world, their feedback on classes and degree structure, for example, is invaluable. This type of communicating works both ways; the alumni feel valued and committed when their opinion and experiences are asked.

As mentioned earlier, the alumni relations program information should make the alumni feel both proud and well educated. Metropolia is the leading university of applied sciences in Finland and the alumni are leaders in their own field. This mindset of a successful Metropolia graduate should be seeded in to the alumni. The best place to reach the alumni is without a doubt through social media channels. It is the most effective, and cost effective, way to reach the alumni. The deeply connected nature of the internet, combined with a very socially aware and engaged generation of students and alumni, makes this channel a powerful tool. All of the promotional material should lead the alumni to social media and from there on to an alumni portal.

5.1 Funding the Alumni Activities

As shown by my research, the respondents were interested in donating to an alumni association. In fact, half of the respondents expressed interest in donating to the alumni activities. There is no tradition of donating to one's alma mater in Finland, but this does not mean it should be overlooked. Metropolia's budget for the alumni relations program is most likely limited and in order to grow, more funding is needed. As mentioned before, it has been a common theme that alumni programs are "interdependent" with the parent universities. The first step is, naturally, to show the budgeting committees the importance and relevance of alumni work. Throughout this Master's Thesis I have shown what potential the alumni can offer to the university in terms of marketing the programs and making employment contacts. The alumni are valuable guest lecturers

and contacts to the students when seeking trainee positions and graduates when seeking employment.

Due to the economic conditions, funding must also be found elsewhere. Many not-for-profits such as alumni associations feel the need to launch income-generating ventures. (Öz & Toker 2008) One of the most effortlessly implemented ways is to collect a membership fee. The results of my alumni survey show that a fee of 20€ seemed like a suitable amount for a onetime or yearly fee. This fee would itself tie the alumni more to the alumni relations program as one is more likely to become active in something they have invested money in. A premium membership concept could be implemented with extra services reserved for those who have paid the fee, such as a university e-mail address, cloud storage, invites to exclusive events or pro-rated advertising space on the university website. This would be a good solution, due to the fact that many international alumni cannot participate in the activities, but would still like to be a part of the networking database.

In the United States, colleges and universities depend on alumni as the major source of financial support for the institution. (Gaier 2005) While universities in Finland are publicly funded, the alumni programs among others could benefit from alumni giving. The idea of donating to one's alma mater should be introduced gradually to the student and alumni population. The seed of possible donations should already be planted when the future alumni are still students. This is done by creating a solid perception of the university and a positive and satisfactory academic experience while studying at the university. Research shows that the donor and organizational relationship significantly predicts the interest in donating. (Wright & Bocarnea 2007) It should be emphasized to students which part of their studies or activities have been made possible through alumni donations of either time or money. Many recent graduates are unable to donate money, hence donating their time should be considered and shown as equally important.

Research has shown that once a positive emotional and logical commitment has been created during the student years, the alumni are likely to be more active in the alumni work as well. Some of the following are reasons why alumni choose to donate: involvement in the institution during their studies, involvement as alumni, institutions tradition and prestige, economic success after graduating, emotional attachment to their alma mater, academic success and overall satisfaction with the student experience.

Likewise, if the university has failed to create such a bond or sense of satisfaction during the student years, the graduates are not likely to take part in alumni activities or donate their time or money to the alumni relations program. Efforts to build good relationships with students are extremely important, since they will pay off later when the alumni are older and have resources to contribute financially. (Gaier 2005) Hence, as mentioned before, alumni work begins the day the student is accepted to the institution.

5.2 Alumni Activities

Alumni activities are services and therefore cannot be protected by patent, (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1985) which means that studying other universities with longer alumni traditions can be very beneficial to a new alumni relations program such as the one at Metropolia.

Based on my questionnaire and my own research, here are some ideas on how to develop the alumni relations program:

- Networking database for alumni and providing employment services
- Local or program/interest based sub-associations / committees, guest lectures
- Social media presence: announce campus events, activities of interest, people and places of interest, current events, and engagement in social topics - i.e. elections. The alumni organization should be present in at least on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Recruitment programs for students; sponsor events etc., create a recruitment part in the database. The part of the networking database could also be opened to employers. Social media could also be used for recruitment purposes, but this would have to be very well defined.
- Offer job placement / employment services for students and alumni (and connections through LinkedIn). This will keep the graduates mindful of Metropolia (and that their university is still there to help), no matter how long ago they have studied there. In parallel with marketing, this point helps with brand building and establishing a strong connection between the alumni and Metropolia, which is essential for a new university.
- Alumni newsletter (e-mail, also some paper versions on important issues) to announce school events, guest speakers/community lecturers. Alums can pay

for an annual campus catalogue (print), which tells what has changed, what has stayed the same over the years.

- Group of student workers / interns to make calls and send letters to collect donations from alums (donations gives your name in a brick for new building / books section for library etc), this is a rather unfamiliar territory in Finnish alumni organizations, but should not be overlooked since it also provides job experience for the interns.
- Discussion on the membership fee. Should there be an optional membership fee?

While the planning and initial steps are taken by the alumni relations program, the idea of the program is not an effort only a few, but something which the faculty, staff, students, and alumni create together. In order to keep the students and alumni engaged, they should do regular evaluations on how the alumni and students perceive the alumni activities. For the alumni work to be sustainable, ways of involvement should not be assumed without asking, as opinions and technologies tend to change. By asking the student and alumni's opinions through regular surveys, for example, the university can create meaningful connections which will lead to greater engagement. (Gasman & Bowman 2013)

Alumni work should also be monitored and both the university and the program itself should analyze their success. Membership and recruitment databases would be the most accurate way to measure the success and they would also provide a way to show if they are staying active. Also the size of the budget is another way to measure the program's accomplishment. The revenue generated by the membership fees and events is something worth following as well, since it provides another measurement tool on the alumni work's success. Some numbers to follow would be how many of the graduates from the graduating class have joined the alumni activities, this would also be a way to measure the alumni brand building. Also, the growth and engagement of the social media channels should be tracked and could provide a measurement tool to follow the brand building and success of the alumni work in general.

5.3 Marketing the Alumni Relations Program

As mentioned before, one of the biggest mistakes in alumni work is 'not being asked.' (Gasman & Bowman 2013) This means that the new graduates are not asked to take part in alumni activities or they have not been engaged in alumni work as students. Again, alumni work begins when the student is accepted to the university and marketing alumni activities should start at the same time.

I suggest service marketing as a marketing strategy for the alumni relations program. The communications-based marketing model is suitable, since the alumni relations program is mainly about communicating and networking. The model focuses more on relationships than transactions. As mentioned in chapter 2, the basis of the communications-based marketing model is that listening should be given as much importance as saying, making the relationship between the alumni relations program and the alumni interactive. All messages that the program sends should be decodable by all the customers and stakeholders; faculty, staff, students and alumni. The distribution channel of these messages should be carefully chosen in order to reach the maximum amount of recipients. This means that the whole Metropolia UAS organization must work together and follow a common strategy. Metropolia's communications department's goal is to support the Metropolia vision and strategy, promote Metropolia's good reputation and unified brand, create premise for networking and cooperation and get applicants interested in Metropolia as a place of study. (Tulosalueen viestintä ja markkinointi 2014) These are all applicable for the alumni relations program as well. While creating a premise for networking and cooperation does include the alumni already, the program should expand the strategic goal of attracting students to attracting alumni as well. Marketing the alumni relations program requires solid cooperation from the Metropolia communications department.

While a common, cross-managed strategy is needed, the alumni relations program must also focus on creating personal relationships with its customers. When communicating with the newly accepted students, current students and the alumni, the alumni relations program should consider Metropolia's relationship with them. Marketing the program to newly accepted students should be enthusiastic, full of promise and expectations. When marketing the program to current students, their success and future expectations should be addressed in a slightly more formal way, whereas when marketing the program to alumni, the program should take an even more formal attitude. This

does not mean that the program should be distant, since personal relationships are the key to communications-based marketing strategy, but the program should consider the alumni message recipients as professionals. Using emotional appeal to nostalgia is one effective way to recruit older alumni to the alumni activities. (Yeshin 1998) This would, for example, mean that from time to time the program should reach out to those who have graduated a while back in an effort to re-engage them news and activities. One way to market the events is to appeal to the good times and memories the alumni had as students. However, while it is understandable to market the program as fun to newly accepted students and current students, the alumni should get a clear professional benefit out of the marketing. This means transitioning the messages throughout the lifecycle of the recipients. It also means that the channels of communication should be appropriate. While the more informal messaging can happen through social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, the formal messages should be delivered through e-mail newsletters and for professional websites such as LinkedIn.

One strategy the alumni relations program could also take into consideration is the gaps model explained in chapter 2. This strategy focuses on closing gaps between the alumni relations program and the alumni, including the program partners. By closing the gaps, the program reaches more audience and keeps them engaged. The main gap in the model for the alumni relations gap is the customer gap. This means the difference between the alumni and student expectations of what the alumni relations program is and perceptions of what the alumni relations program actually offers. The communications-based marketing model calls for clear messages when communicating what the program offers and this is exactly what is needed to close the customer gap. The alumni relations program's communications channels must provide accurate information on what the program offers. When researching for information online about Metropolia's alumni activities, I came across several conflicting messages. In order to close the customer gap, the program must offer what it promises and the quality must be what the students and alumni expect. If the customer gap is not closed and demand is not met or the program does not offer the services with assurance, empathy and reliability, the customers will lose interest. Regaining the once lost alumni will be exceedingly difficult, if they feel let down by the alumni relations program. It is vital to the alumni relations program that all channels which have previously offered information on the alumni association be changed so that only current, accurate and reliable information about the alumni relations program is delivered.

The other four gaps in the gaps model are the provider gaps. The first provider gap is the listening gap. The importance of listening was already stressed in the communications-based marketing model, but the gaps model will focus on more practical approaches. Closing the listening gap basically requires the program to get feedback from the customers and then take action based on that feedback. There should always be an open feedback channel to all stakeholders and customers, namely the faculty, staff, students and alumni. Since the alumni are taking special focus, the program should at least perform yearly surveys to collect this feedback. The survey could ask the alumni about their opinion on current state of the alumni relations program and what their suggestions might be to further develop the program. Similar surveys could also be conducted to the students, but perhaps not as often. In addition to the bigger annual survey, the program could also conduct smaller targeted surveys in the form of a trailer calls. A trailer call a short survey sent to new graduates soon after they have become alumni. Listening to the alumni's expectations and perceptions of the alumni relations program will keep the alumni more engaged. The survey will also serve as a great marketing tool, reminding the alumni of the existence of the program, the alma mater, and perhaps its sponsors.

The second provider gap is service design and standards gap. This gap must be closed in order for the alumni relations program to achieve service excellence. For this gap, the alumni relations program should take into consideration the results of the alumni survey performed when closing the listening gap. Using information acquired from the customers, the alumni relations programs services and standards are designed so that they fulfill the needs of the students and alumni. The previously suggested services should be delivered in a logical and carefully designed way by following the Metropolia strategies and standards. This will close the service design and standards gap.

The third provider gap is the performance gap. The performance of the alumni relations program should be carefully monitored, so that there is no inconsistency between the planned services and standards and the actual delivery of the alumni relation programs services. This should be done through an annual internal evaluation. The alumni coordinator(s) should fill this gap through careful and thorough work. Metropolia as an institution can help to close this gap by training the coordinators and offering them support and the technology needed to follow through with the planned services. This also

means that the role of the communications department is essential in closing the performance gap, especially if the alumni relations program consists of only one paid employee. Metropolia as an employer could also use a rewarding system when closing the performance gap. This could, for example, mean that if the annual alumni survey results are excellent, the coordinators are rewarded accordingly. Incentives could be offered for acquiring new donors or meeting pre-defined goals.

The fourth and final provider gap is the communication gap. It focuses on the difference between the actual alumni services and what is communicated to the students and alumni. Here, one of the key elements is choosing the right channels for communication. Technologies change and the alumni relations program must remain fluent in all available marketing channels where they expect to reach customers. This means staying up to date on the most popular and most used websites, social media, apps, etc. The services are of no use, if they do not reach the students and the alumni. As mentioned before, all the players in the strategy must be on the same page and messages carried out on all channels should follow the overall strategy. This again requires cooperation with the communications department.

5.4 Alumni Relations Program in Social Media

Social media is particularly important when engaging students and alumni representing minorities and international students, since they appear to respond well to web-based channels. This way, the alumni can have direct and immediate interaction with the program coordinators and other members, without being physically present. (Gasman & Bowman 2013)

Social media is also a tool used in institutional commitment, something that will tie students, the future alumni, to Metropolia. Students are indeed the priority when launching any new programs relating to the university. Research has shown that students shift attention rapidly from one task to another and respond quickly and also expect the same kind of rapid response from their services. They also prefer activities that are social in nature and their definition of social includes blogging etc. (Offerman 2007) Hence, the social media presence is extremely important to the alumni relations program. The program, however, must make sure that their social media presence is not confusing. I suggest that they link most of their social medial channels together and combine the messages with clear and consistent branding in order for the information

to reach the maximum audience. All channels must also be maintained. When I started writing this Master's Thesis in 2013, I noticed that the alumni association's Twitter account was last updated over a year ago and there was a direct link to their Twitter account from their website. If for example the alumni relations program goes on a "tweeting hiatus", perhaps they should remove the link from the website and only add it, if they plan on being active on Twitter. Otherwise their credibility as an active program is at stake.

The alumni coordinator(s) take a gate-keeper role in assuring that adequate planning is in place and that the social media channels which program is actively involved in are functioning. (Offerman 2007) Due to the international nature of many of the programs, I suggest that a Facebook group (or similar, depending on what channel is in use at the time) be created for each starting class, perhaps one per program, depending on the size of the program. This will give an opportunity for those of us who live on other continents to still be active and maintain connections after graduating. It's these types of relationships that can serve as useful professional connections after leaving the university. For example, a Facebook group is created for all the new MBA-program students and the link to this group should already be in the acceptance letter the new students receive. They are also invited and advised to join the alumni relations program group and Metropolia UAS group. All interaction should be in the language of degree program. For example, the interaction in a group for an English degree program should be in English even if the majority of the students in the group were Finnish. Once the students have joined their individual group, the coordinator encourages one or two members of the group to become an admin, who will take over the group administration. The groups will from then on manage themselves through these student admin roles, encouraging them from early on to take step up into an active leadership role. This not only builds profession confidence, but also professional competence as they maintain this mindset throughout their time at the university. As time goes on, these groups gradually become alumni groups as the students move on to new chapters in their lives, allowing them to keep in touch with friends and colleagues. A list for these groups should be found on the alumni relations program's official Facebook page so that students are able to find their respective groups later on. Businesses and alumni should also be encouraged to use these groups as a platform for reaching to one another on a more direct level.

5.5 The Development Plan



Figure 9. Twelve elements of development

I have created a twelve step plan to summarize the development the alumni relations program. The first step of my development plan is to organize the alumni relations operational team according to Ms. Kaarni's plan. This means that specific people currently employed at Metropolia are appointed to be responsible for each task. The alumni relations coordinator(s) will monitor that everyone is up to date on their tasks and that the tasks are performed. In order to establish the alumni relations program, Metropolia needs to make long-term investments and dedication to the plan. The current state analysis and plan follow-up revealed that Metropolia alumni relations program appeared to be rather unknown to students and alumni alike. As previously mentioned one alumnus respondent mentioned having only heard of Metropolia's alumni functions during my presentation at the thesis seminar in the spring of 2014. In fact, after that particular presentation, several of my fellow Master's degree students approached me and complemented me on my choice of topic and were hoping to hear more of the alumni relations program. One of them told me that they felt that supervisors had not appreciated my topic enough during that seminar meeting and they expressed their

wish that Metropolia would indeed take alumni matters more seriously. It appears that while the alumni relations coordinator is working extremely hard to uphold the program, further assistance is needed especially from the Metropolia Communications Department in order to promote the program aggressively. This includes reaching out to the international students in particular, since they might otherwise not take part in the program due to the temporary nature of their stay in Finland.

The difference between the alumni relations program and the alumni association must also be addressed right away. If only one of them continues to exist, this needs to be made clear to all stakeholders. While the association itself is not part of the scope of this Master's Thesis, I have made some suggestions. If the association is still kept alive and wishes to be separate from other Metropolia alumni functions, dividing which tasks each group takes on is essential from the alumni and student point of view. Since the respondents to the survey asked for more networking events and some more social events, perhaps the association itself could focus on social events and networking, while the Metropolia alumni activities would focus on career advancement and networking. If the association intends to survive, it needs an active board, aggressive recruitment measures, clear targets and direct communication and cooperation with the alumni relations program; these coupled with the necessary funding and concept of being a Metropolia alumni together with the alumni relations program can create a sustainable alumni association. While I was conducting my study, the focus of the plan changed from an association to an alumni relations program. Hence my survey questionnaire was formed so that the respondents understood the alumni work as an association. While it seemed at the time of the questionnaire that an association could be formed, later in my research it became clear that what Metropolia had planned was an alumni relations program. The responses from the questionnaire, are, however applicable for the program as well. I do believe that Metropolia would benefit from an alumni association as well, governed by the alumni relations program. While the program would focus more on the academic and business side of the alumni work, the association could focus more on the social aspect of alumni work. This would be something for the alumni relations program to consider and could be funded through the membership fee. The program itself can, however, function on its own without an alumni association present. This requires the alumni relations program to market itself aggressively as the primary Metropolia alumni representative. All references to the association should be removed from Metropolia's website and other materials, unless the association will be integrated to Metropolia alumni relations program.

The next element in my plan is funding. Since the program must be made sustainable, which is the one of the biggest challenges of the Metropolia alumni relations program. In order to have a sustainable program the size of the organization must be increased. Alumni associations with only volunteer workers as staff cannot be run in such magnitude as is needed of a university of Metropolia's size and one coordinator, however productive, seems inadequate. The program needs more employees in order to function properly. If funding for this cannot be found from the university itself, the employees must be funded by collecting fees or donations. While I understand that Finnish institutions of higher education are under strict budgets and their funding has been cut, I believe that using funds to create a more active and useful alumni relations program will be worth spending more on. Investing money on alumni work can easily be justified by looking into the basic function of university of applied sciences; the universities are there to provide trained work force for both the public and the private sector. If a university believes its job is done after the student has received their diploma, I believe an adjustment of attitude is in order. If universities focus only on producing graduates, but do not concern themselves with the graduates' employment or how the alumni could assist the students in their studies or gaining employment, they are wasting an important resource. Therefore, while alumni relations program should be able to fund part of their functions through membership fees and donations, universities themselves should consider their alumni work funding policy and use the vast resource of alumni they themselves have produced.

For additional funding I would suggest creating membership categories. As mentioned before, paid members would receive additional services from the program. From the results of my questionnaire, it appears that a fee of 20€ seems like a suitable amount for both a onetime and a yearly fee. Since the respondents were unsure of the functions of alumni associations and alumni activities in general, this amount was perhaps considered adequate for services which you might or might not use. Another way of gaining funds is through donations. One of the surprising results of the survey was the amount of respondents who would be willing to donate money to alumni work. It was clear that those willing to donate would like to know where their donations would go and hence have a good enough reason to donate. As mentioned by one of the alumni respondents the program should start offering "Corporate Membership" to Metropolia's alumni database. This is something the Metropolia alumni relations program should capitalize on and it would make an excellent way of funding the database itself. The

program should also reach out to multinational corporations, since many of the Metropolia degree programs are in English. As more funding is secured, the next step is to hire more employees. The program representatives should also look in to offering unpaid or paid internships for credits and recruit volunteers from students and alumni alike.

The fourth step is to create the networking and recruiting database. If such a database is already created, now would be the time to make sure it is operational and suitable for the purposes mentioned above. The fifth step is to plan events for the next academic year. These events should include recurring annual events along with other scheduled events and room for a variety of spontaneous activities throughout the academic year.

The sixth step is to start planning for the marketing campaign to launch the alumni relations program on full force. One student respondent suggested that Metropolia alumni relations program should have a personality or a mascot to whom the program would personify itself with. I think this is an excellent suggestion and would further develop it for recruiting some of the Metropolia alumni who are already television or music personalities in order to bring more attention to the campaign. Metropolia has many personalities among their graduates who have gained success with wider audiences. Asking one or two of them to donate time to the alumni program campaigns would be an excellent way to get the program started. Throughout my research I came across the problem that many students and alumni in Finland had no idea what being an alumnus means. A clear alumni concept of the Proud Metropolia Alumni must be created in order for the alumni relations program to attract active participants. This could be done by explaining what an alumnus is to the students from day one. The program should create a brochure, either electronic or paper version, which would be handed out to both starting students as well as graduating students. All the materials, as well as the website and networking database, should be in both Finnish and English to cater both the domestic and international students and alumni.

The alumni relations program's website should have explanations on their homepage about who the alumni are, which brings us to step 7. The program needs to organize their website and social media presence; special attention should be paid to the details in the alumni relations program's communication channel content. It is vital for the alumni relations program's success that information be made easily accessible, as one of the main tasks is to attract new active alumni participants. During my research I

found several inconsistencies in the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences website when it came to the alumni work. I have informed the alumni relations coordinator of these and I believe she has taken action.

As mentioned before, the key phrase in alumni work is to 'reach out and engage'. One of the respondents in my survey wrote that "the ones [current services] mentioned here are very nice, it's strange that I've never heard of this association", which seemed to be the feeling I also received when discussing the alumni activities with my fellow students. Most of the students and co-workers I talked to were excited to hear alumni activities existed/would exist, but were also perplexed why they had never been informed of such. In order for alumni work to be successful, the target audience must be reached and then kept engaged. As mentioned before, the alumni must be already reached out to when they are newly accepted students; their orientation package should have information about the alumni relations program and the social media channels. The next and eighth step is to launch the new student program through these packages and the designated Facebook groups. Step nine, which is the recruiting of the new student volunteers to administrate these groups. One of the student respondents mentioned the student organization Metka. This was a valuable insight as the cooperation between the student organization and the alumni relations program is something to consider. At the very least Metka could mention the alumni relations program during their events and have links to information on their website. The alumni relations program could also partake in some of the Metka events to introduce the program to students.

Once the students have graduated, the alumni relations program could remind them of their status as the esteemed Metropolia alumni, which is step ten. This could be done for example through a gift from the alumni relations program. When I was discussing my ideas with Liisa Salo and Melissa Rask from the Metropolia Communications Department, I suggested that the gift could be for example a Metropolia logo mug with the words like Proud Metropolia Alumni. This mug serves many purposes, one of which is a reminder to the graduate that they are valued and that they graduated from an esteemed university of applied sciences. They are appreciated even after graduation and the gift strengthens their spirit as Metropolia graduates. Since it is likely that the graduate will take the mug to their place of employment, it also serves as marketing tool. While I understand that the funds are limited in all Metropolia departments, this kind of investment is something that will pay itself back. It could be for example tested on one

graduating class, for example from the Master's degree programs and a survey could be made afterwards to see the effect of the investment.

The last two steps are designed to keep the program sustainable and running. Once the program has found its place, it should continue with the new student recruitment and the graduating student reminders. More corporate members should be acquired and with the funding gained from them and the new paying alumni members, the program can continue to expand. Once the program is running smoothly, it can launch campaigns to reach out to the "older" alumni, who are the hardest to get engaged. The investments made in the alumni relations program should also be monitored. In order to assure that the goals are reached I suggest a mission-driven approach. During certain intervals, the program should evaluate itself asking three main questions: has the institution defined an appropriate purpose, does the institution have the resources necessary to achieve the stated purpose, is the institution assessing results in order to make sure that the desired purpose is being achieved? (Offerman 2007) Another way to keep track of the program's success is with annual questionnaires sent to the alumni, and perhaps to a selected group of students (for example one graduating class). As I suggested in chapter 2, SERVQUAL might also be something to consider about after the program has been established.

5.6 Limitations

This plan and suggestions above are based on the available research and data. The limitations in making this plan were that I did not have quantitative objectives, since I did not have access to information on specific financial resources available for this project. Therefore a concrete budget planning is out of the scope of this thesis. This plan is based on a hypothetical budget that could be allocated to the project and the plan focuses on creating a sustainable program. Since the alumni activities in this plan can be scaled up or down depending on the available resources, a predetermined budget is not required to illustrate the plan.

6 Feedback

The initial plan was presented to the Head of the Programme Erja Turunen, Alumni Relations Coordinator and the Metropolia Communications Department. The plan was welcomed in a very positive and encouraging way. I received invaluable insights from those who would actually implement the plan and this has made the plan much more practical.

The Head of the Programme wrote that “a sustainable, long-term approach is what can be initiated with the help of your work.” This was exactly what I hoped to achieve with the plan, so the comment was very encouraging. She also gave advice on how to make the plan more practical and I have added some figures in order to do so. The Head of the Programme stressed in her comments that the multi-disciplinary approach to Alumni Activities is important and can give added value to those who already graduated, which is very true. She agreed with my assessments and wrote very fittingly that the “alumni can also bring so much for the students who are studying; they represent working life - coming back to the basic reasons for the existence of UAS's, the alumni can give back. A win-win situation, in many ways.” This is exactly the kind of attitude the alumni relations program leaders want the university administration to express.

The Alumni Coordinator commented that she found that we were quite on the same page when developing the alumni relations program. She said that the plan will benefit her work in the future greatly. She wanted to also remind that while the alumni association itself does still exist legally, Metropolia alumni relations program has no collaboration whatsoever with them. This is indeed a rather confusing fact and I have taken this into consideration in my work. The Alumni Coordinator plans to continue developing “the Alumni Relations from a pair of words into a well-designed concept, where Alumni would be seen as our Key Customers, hoping one day our entire UAS would accepted Alumni Relations operations as a natural strategic partners and an everyday connection between the Higher education and business/working life,” which sounds like an excellent plan. The Metropolia Communications Department agreed with the Alumni Coordinator's comments. They stressed that the alumni activities are a part of Metropolia's operations and approved of my marketing plans as realistic and achievable.

The plan was also presented to 15 students and alumni, out of whom 11 answered. Five students and six alumni commented on the plan including a few international alumni. Their valuable comments further supported the hypothesis that the concept of being an alumni was not well known and that there is definite interest towards the Metropolia alumni relations program.

Most of the respondents said that they had never heard of Metropolia alumni relations program. One alumni respondent mentioned having only heard of Metropolia's alumni functions during my presentation at the thesis seminar in the spring of 2014. Several of the respondents mentioned they did not know what being an alumnus meant, but were curious to find out more. A second year Metropolia student wrote that they had not yet heard the word alumni while at Metropolia at all. Their first day orientation was very short and they had not taken part in the student organization Metka's events either. They were wondering if they would have heard more about the alumni relations program, if they had joined Metka. Either way, they hoped for more information on the alumni relations program, a wish which every one of the eleven respondents had mentioned in their comments. They also felt that the alumni relations program would need to clarify its targets and benefits to students and alumni alike. Several of the respondents mentioned they would be willing to pay a membership fee. One alumnus, however, pointed out that if Metropolia would like them to speak at their events, they shouldn't have to then pay the fee. They wrote that they are not interested in both paying and donating time. One student respondent wished that there was more "sense of belonging" in Metropolia, since now it just seemed everyone was working on their own to graduate and then go their separate ways. One alumni wrote that they would like Metropolia to have a yearly alumni event for the students to remind them of their upcoming status as an alumnus.

The student and alumni who commented seemed really interested in the program. Many commented how excited they were that these plans might materialize and they could be part of an alumni network. They also felt that the alumni work should start when the student is accepted as part of the program. One student suggested that the alumni program should get a head personality to run their campaign, which is an excellent suggestion. Both the students and alumni respondents mentioned particularly the career and networking services something that they would be interested in. My plan regarding the evolving Facebook groups was received very positively. One student suggested that these Facebook groups could also be used during their studies as part

of their classes and that the administrators of these groups could get credits for their work. This kind of reward would certainly keep the administrators more actively involved in the groups. Other practical suggestions coming from the respondents were that Metropolia could offer opportunities for the alumni to use their facilities for example for media production and that employers could purchase a "Corporate Membership" to Metropolia's alumni database. They wrote that a few thousand Euros a year to be a part of this database would not be a big investment in human resources for a bigger company. In fact, there are a lot of people retiring in the nearby years and competition between companies to hire fresh new workforce will demand drastic measures from human resources.

One alumnus commented that they would really like the alumni relations program to plan physical events, not just operate in social media. The same alumnus also wrote that "geolocation of the network is also important since many students are from abroad or they move abroad." Both virtual and physical services received positive feedback. Another alumnus stressed the importance of social activities, since they felt that most academic events were "pompous" and they preferred networking in a more informal fashion. Another alumnus wrote that the alumni database sounds like an excellent plan and they have several Metropolia graduates working at their company. They previously did not know that they had all graduated from the same institution and the alumni respondent pointed out that their company had gained a lot through Metropolia without perhaps even acknowledging it. By creating a previously mentioned database, where employers could have perhaps a slightly more limited access than the alumni, would serve as a great career tool and would certainly interest alumni and students looking for employment.

7 Conclusions

My research questions were the following; how can Metropolia's alumni activities be further developed to meet the needs of both students and alumni and how can the alumni activities be made sustainable. Both questions were studied and answered in the development plan with the international aspect of alumni work in mind. The funding tactics suggested in this Master's Thesis will help to create an alumni relations program that will stay active and is sustainable. The alumni play an important part in marketing universities both domestically and internationally as graduated students enter the working world as ambassadors of Metropolia. Having strong ties to the alumni relations program from the start of their university careers, the alumni will be able to continue networking and therefore advertising their schools in their places of employment, both in and outside of Finland.

After introducing my development plan to Metropolia and the student and alumni respondents, I found that all parties to be excited about it. Some of the students and alumni were under the impression that Metropolia's alumni work was very unorganized and some felt that the institution had little interest in them after (or even before) they graduated. This further supports my plan of introducing the alumni relations program right from the beginning in order to create this "sense of belonging" from early on. Students and graduates alike are something Metropolia should be proud of; they showcase the institution's success and both Metropolia and the students and alumni should feel that they achieved their success together. By following my twelve step development plan, the alumni relations program can ensure that all parties are taken into consideration. This is how the Metropolia "spirit" will be created.

In the beginning of August, 2014 a new Alumni Portal was launched. (Metropolia Ammattikorkeakoulun Alumnit n.d.) Due to the timing of the launch, this portal will be out of the scope of this Master's Thesis. The portal, however, features a registry for the alumni, which is something that the respondents on my survey requested. It also appears that the alumni Twitter account was resurrected on August 8th, 2014, which is an excellent step towards active alumni work. There still is plenty of room for development as for example the alumni blog hasn't been updated since November 2013. An active alumni relations program will be, as mentioned before, a desirable strategic partner and will represent the best educated individuals and competent labor force in Finland. I plan on presenting this Master's Thesis personally to Metropolia representatives during late

spring of 2015 to ensure that it reaches its target audience. The suggestions I have made in this Master's Thesis will further develop and supplement the current progress in the Metropolia alumni relations program.

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Alumni Association Survey 2014

Alumni Association Survey 2014

Please fill in this short survey and give your opinion about alumni associations to help to improve the Metropolia Alumni Association. Both students and alumni (i.e. those who have graduated) from any universities are more than welcome to participate!

There will be some multiple choice questions and room for your own thoughts as well. You may write your answers in English, Finnish, Swedish or German.

The results of this survey will be kept anonymous and used in my Master's thesis for the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Thank you for your help!

Alumni Survey - Background information

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR CURRENT EDUCATIONAL STATUS:

- I am a Student, Bachelor's degree
 Student, Master's degree
 Alumni
 Other

WHICH UNIVERSITY ARE YOU ATTENDING/HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED?

Please specify:

WHAT IS YOUR EXPECTED YEAR OF GRADUATION/WHEN DID YOU GRADUATE?

Please fill in the year:

ARE/WERE YOU AN INTERNATIONAL OR EXCHANGE STUDENT IN FINLAND?

- Please select: Yes, I am/was an International Student in Finland
 Yes, I am/was an Exchange Student in Finland
 No

Alumni Survey - Alumni Association

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH YOUR CURRENT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

- Please select: Yes, I am a member or plan to join the association once I graduate
 Yes, but I have not or plan not to join the alumni association
 Yes, but I don't know much about it
 No, I don't know my alumni association, but would like to know more
 No, I don't know my alumni association and am not interested in it

IF YOU ANSWERED "Yes, but I have not or plan not to join the alumni association":

Please specify why:

IN YOUR OPINION, ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS ARE NECESSARY AND OFFER VALUE:

- Please select: Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neutral
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

Please share your thoughts:

Alumni Survey - Developing the Alumni Associations

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT SERVICES SHOULD AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OFFER?

The Metropolia Alumni Association currently offers invites to events, Focus magazine from Metropolia UAS and discounts.

Please share your thoughts:

WHAT SHOULD THE MEMBERSHIP FOR AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION COST?

Please select:

- I would be willing to pay a onetime fee
- I would be willing to pay a yearly fee, if I received additional services such as alumni email address, networking database etc.
- I would not want to pay or participate in alumni activities

IF YOU ANSWERED "I would be willing to pay a onetime fee":

For example, the current onetime fee for Metropolia Alumni Association is €15

Please fill in an amount you would be willing to pay:

IF YOU ANSWERED "I would be willing to pay a yearly fee, if I received additional services":

For example, the current yearly fee for University of Helsinki Alumni Association is €36

Please fill in an amount you would be willing to pay:

WOULD YOU CONSIDER DONATING TO AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

Please select:

- Yes
- Yes, if I received additional benefits
- No.

IF YOU ANSWERED "Yes" WHAT BENEFITS WOULD BE NECESSARY IN ORDER FOR YOU TO DONATE?

Benefits could include honorary mentions in magazines, trophies, certificates, name plaques in buildings etc.

Please share your thoughts:

Alumni Survey - Thank you!

IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ABOUT ANY AREAS NOT COVERED BY THIS SURVEY, PLEASE DO SO NOW:

Please share your thoughts:

Proceed

Save

Thank you for your help in building better alumni associations! Your input is very much appreciated!

Results of Alumni Association Survey 2014

Below are the unedited answers received through the online survey:

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR CURRENT EDUCATIONAL STATUS:

Student, Bachelor's degree	6
Student, Master's degree	8
Alumni	13
Other	3

WHICH UNIVERSITY ARE YOU ATTENDING/HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED?

Metropolia UAS/ Stadia	16
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	2
Helsinki University of Technology / Aalto University	2
University of Oulu	1
Llverpool Hope University	1
University of Helsinki	7
Haaga-Helia	1
Laurea University of Applied Sciences	1
Modesto Jr College	1
The University of Manchester	1
University of Vermont	1

WHAT IS YOUR EXPECTED YEAR OF GRADUATION/WHEN DID YOU GRADUATE?

1998	1
2004	1
2008	2
2009	3
2010	3
2011	1
2012	2
2013	2
2014	9

2015	3
2016	2
2017	1

ARE/WERE YOU AN INTERNATIONAL OR EXCHANGE STUDENT IN FINLAND?

Yes, I am/was an International Student in Finland	2
Yes, I am/was an Exchange Student in Finland	3
No	25

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH YOUR CURRENT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

Yes, I am a member or plan to join the association once I graduate	5
Yes, but I have not or plan not to join the alumni association	1
Yes, but I don't know much about it	9
No, I don't know my alumni association, but would like to know more	11
No, I don't know my alumni association and am not interested in it	4

IF YOU ANSWERED "Yes, but I have not or plan not to join the alumni association":

Please specify why:

- It's useless

IN YOUR OPINION, ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS ARE NECESSARY AND OFFER VALUE:

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	8
Neutral	16
Disagree	
Strongly Disagree	1

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

- Keep former students involved in University activities and provide networking for current/graduating students
- networking
- To build networking and a sense of community among students and graduates. Also to keep alumni in touch with the University and what they can still offer graduates.
- To provide opportunities for previous students to connect.
- To get and maintain contacts with enterprises, business angels and such etc.
- "invites to events and discounts", sounds good
- Connecting, networking with peer alumni
- To develop the cooperation between university and companies & important individuals
- help gather publicity and money for the school? i am unsure
- keep in touch
- I don't know/ En osaa sanoa, sillä tiedän hyvin vähän alumni toiminnasta.
- Networking events
- Support students in school and offer info and help in finding work.
- To pass on knowledge, and to keep up with fellow alumni's.
- Alumni support, maintaining contact with University and fellow students.
- Network to improve work resources
- I don't really know how the whole thing works
- Networking and fundraising for the university
- no idea
- None
- Jakaa asiantuntemusta ja kokemuksia opiskelijoille
- to help alumni with career planning and goals. To assist in networking. To raise money for the institution and events
- networking
- Luulisin, että ne olisivat parhaita vastavalmistuneille; ehkä voisivat jakaa tietoa työelämästä tms.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT SERVICES SHOULD AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OFFER?

The Metropolia Alumni Association currently offers invites to events, Focus magazine from Metropolia UAS and discounts.

- A University e-mail address, newsletters/updates, invites to events & parties, exclusive events (for alums only), discounts/offers on activities, events or products.
- networking database
- Offers and information on community and academic events, host academic events/lectures/fundraisers/workshops/networking opportunities and meet-and-greets, etc. Offer a magazine with news, email address/dropbox like file storage?
- luentoja tai koulutustapahtumia
- events

- Current ones are fine
- Some sort of system to make it easy to give real company projects to the students, something like solved.fi etc
- Verkostoitumista, työnvälitystä/head hunting tms., Yrittäjyyden tukemista jotenkin (seminaarit, workshopit yms.)
- More events, bigger events, connections to businesses
- It could organize visits to companies who are willing to present their business
- The ones mentioned here are very nice, it's strange that I've never heard of this association.
- News, library services, events, contact with tutors and fellow students, post grad opportunities
- any tool useful to provide professional bridges, as well as events, discounts, forums for discussions regarding common problems
- events sounds good?
- Networking events, social events, fundraising events
- we all are studying for career development, so I believe main focus should be there + support
- Free booze
- career services and networking
- Ehkä sitä työelämäohjausta, tietysti joku oman yliopiston tiedotuslehti saattaisi olla kiinnostava

WHAT SHOULD THE MEMBERSHIP FOR AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION COST?

I would be willing to pay a onetime fee	8
I would be willing to pay a yearly fee, if I received additional services such as alumni email address, networking database etc.	15
I would not want to pay or participate in alumni activities	7

IF YOU ANSWERED " I would be willing to pay a onetime fee": For example, the current onetime fee for Metropolia Alumni Association is €15

Please fill in an amount you would be willing to pay:

10€	2
15€	2
20€	5
25€	1
30€	1
50€	2

IF YOU ANSWERED "I would be willing to pay a yearly fee, if I received additional services.":

For example, the current yearly fee for University of Helsinki Alumni Association is €36

Please fill in an amount you would be willing to pay:

5€	1
10€	1
15€	2
20€	3
25€	2
30€	3
40€	1
100€	1

WOULD YOU CONSIDER DONATING TO AN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION?

Yes	12
Yes, if I received additional benefits	3
No	15

IF YOU ANSWERED "Yes" WHAT BENEFITS WOULD BE NECESSARY IN ORDER FOR YOU TO DONATE?

Benefits could include honorary mentions in magazines, trophies, certificates, name plaques in buildings etc. Please share your thoughts:

- honorary mentions in magazines, certificates, name on plaque or building
- Contacts (f.g. seminars or meetings with motivated people)
- All mentioned above plus some sort of alumni mentoring programme would be good.
- The above are good, but I'd have to know more about where the money was going.
- Certain amount gives free membership for five years
- again, the things mentioned above sound good as well.
- A mention should be enough, anything else is an ego trip.
- no benefits, just good enough reason to do it
- None

IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE ABOUT ANY AREAS NOT COVERED BY THIS SURVEY, PLEASE DO SO NOW:

Please share your thoughts:

- Markkinoikaa tehokkaammin yhdistyksen olemassaolon tehtävistä ja tärkeydestä, mielellään molemilla kielillä (fi/en). Eduista jäsenille jne. mitä arvoa yhdistys voisi tuottaa, jos esim. tulisi vuosimaksu.
- Much of the related points I would find useful from alumni association could be arranged by emails, not being needed to waste resources in big events
- As a recent graduate I find it bothersome when they call for donations because we are still paying for student loans
- i do not know his area so well, but believe that budget support for Alumni should be mostly from 1.organised activities, 2.possible investments
- Currently there is no purpose to have any alumni association
- I am frequently contacted to donate money as an alum. This is upsetting to me, as I am still paying a lot of money in student loans. Tuition at this University, and many in the USA, are ridiculously expensive, and one benefit should be alumni services

Summary of the Development Plan

1 Overview:

- The current state analysis shows that the Metropolia alumni work is passive and not very organized
- Recruiting efforts and results are weak and compared to the amount of students graduating from Metropolia UAS, only a miniscule amount of graduates join the Association
- Metropolia UAS had previously funded a part time alumni coordinator, but that funding was cut by the end of 2013 resulting in rather uncoordinated Association. Alumni relations program has one paid alumni coordinator.
- Alumni relations program's Facebook group is somewhat active, but association's Twitter account has not been updated in months, although it's listed on their website (or rather web-page)
- It is unclear how a graduating student can join the alumni activities through their website

2 Objectives:

- Re-activate the alumni relations program and develop alumni functions
- Create a source of funding for the program
- Create a recruitment plan for the program

3 Target audience:

- Accepted students (information on the alumni relations program should be in the acceptance package)
- Current students (alumni info from day 1 of the studies)
- Alumni (reconnecting with graduates)

4 What are the most important things to say when recruiting new members:

- Being an active alumni has multiple benefits for the recent graduate:

- Networking
- Career development through events
- Social events, keeping in touch with former classmates
- Discounts and offers
- Create a concept of Proud Metropolia Alumni

5 What are the supporting rational and emotional reasons for being a member:

- Concept of being an esteemed Metropolia Alumni must be created:
 - Being an Metropolia Alumni is a prestigious title, you have graduated from the largest UAS in Finland and received education from the most acclaimed education system in the world

6 What else will assist development?

- Funding and recruiting members are the biggest challenges. The alumni relations program must be made both active and sustainable
- Program needs at least one paid employee, preferably two to three employees
- Funding should be gained from both Metropolia UAS and the alumni
- Alumni relations program needs a proper website and joining the activities must be made effortless
- Membership should be offered in two ways: free membership and paid membership
- Paid membership should have an affordable yearly fee and paid members will gain extra benefits such as the magazine, email address, classes and events
- Free membership means access to the social media groups and mailing lists etc. and to the much needed networking/recruiting database, which should be global
- Program must seek corporate partners in order to fund activities

7 Schedule and checklist: What is needed from the alumni relations program?

- The program needs to re-organize itself and appoint specific people responsible for tasks. The theoretical model proposed by Christina Kaarni should be followed
- Funding must also be sorted out (gain Metropolia UAS funding, create the new membership categories etc.) and an employee(s) hired
- The program should recruit one or two “celebrity” graduates to represent the program in order to personify the program and gain attention of students and alumni
- A brochure describing the alumni relations program must be created, explaining what being an alumnus means and highlighting all the services and benefits for the alumni
- Joining the activities must be made effortless, informative website must be created to link all existing information channels
- Recruitment efforts must begin from the next batch of new students; alumni relations program’s welcome-letter (including the links to both the class specific Facebook group and Alumni group) with the acceptance letter, begin recruiting administrators for Facebook groups, program should be present at orientation
- Once the program has the funding and services set up, it should start a larger scale recruitment process aimed at the alumni. This recruitment process should be personalized according to degree programs and include the alumni from previous years, also from the years when the alumni graduated from the predeceasing institutions.