

“Colleges and universities are tight-knit communities for four years. Once students graduate and disperse, these communities need a way to remain close. The sentiment for the institution and feelings of mutual support that people offer one another don’t stop just because they earn their diplomas; in fact, these feelings can deepen over time. Affinity Circles eliminates several barriers to sustaining these relationships through its creative and effective use of technology.”

David Rowe
Vice President for Advancement
LaGrange College

LaGrange College Alumni & Family Relations Background

Founded in 1831, LaGrange College is the oldest private college in Georgia. LaGrange is a four-year liberal arts and sciences institution offering 50 academic and pre-professional programs and graduate degrees in education. Affiliated with the United Methodist Church, LaGrange is ranked by U.S. News & World Report among the South's top comprehensive colleges and among that category's top 10 "best values."

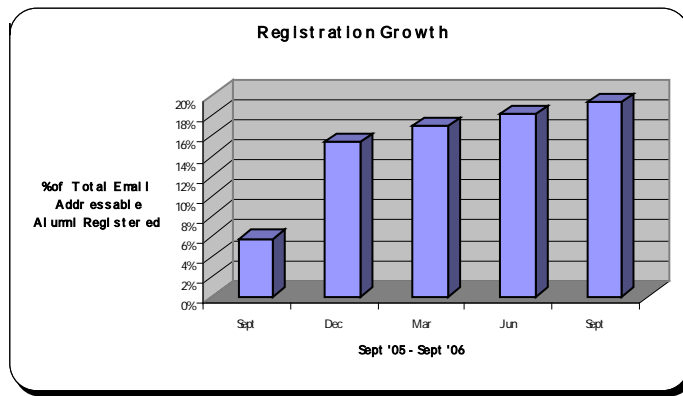
LaGrange College is committed to challenging the minds and inspiring the souls of students by improving their creative, critical and communicative abilities. The Alumni & Family Relations office focuses its efforts on continuing this commitment throughout the lives of its alumni.

The Evolution of Communication Services for Alumni

Traditionally, LaGrange alumni have had access to information on their alma mater through the College’s web site, Columns magazine, and FYI, the weekly campus newsletter. Alums also receive targeted mailings from the Alumni office with information that may interest them. A previous interactive solution offered by the Alumni office included a static message board on the web site that enabled alumni to log-in, create their profiles, and post communications to other alums. Despite its efforts, the Alumni office realized there was little interaction taking place on the site and sought a solution that would better engage alumni and help build a dynamic and lasting community.

LaGrange first learned about Affinity Circles at an industry conference. “Affinity Circles is cutting edge technology for academic institutions,” said David Rowe, the vice president for advancement. “It enables us to not only relate to our constituents more effectively but also take advantage of the broader social networking technology phenomenon taking shape around us.”

After revamping the alumni pages on the LaGrange web site, the Alumni office integrated the Affinity Circles solution and let it grow organically for the first three months. At the end of that period almost 10 percent of the 5,000 alumni with email addresses on record, had registered. “It really took off from day one and populated itself, ultimately becoming an integral part of what the alumni site is now,” commented David Beard, the College’s webmaster. Since that time, additional marketing efforts have boosted participation, enabling them to reach their 18 month goal of 20 percent alumni registered in just over 12 months.



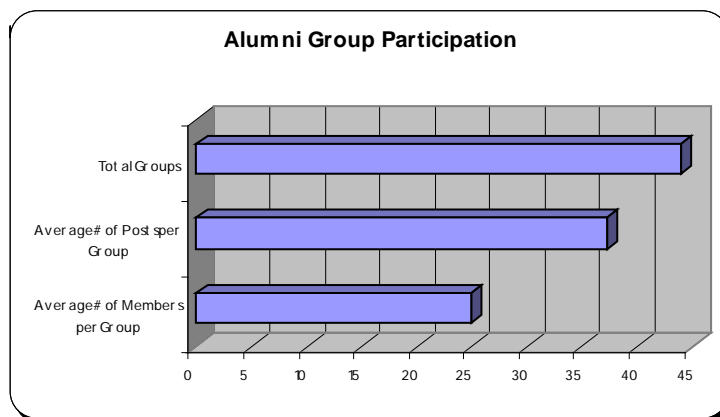
A Better Way to Get the Word Out

Affinity Circles has enabled the Alumni office to more efficiently connect with alumni and leverage member profile information to more effectively create and market events that reflect the interests of the community. More importantly, Affinity Circles has helped the Alumni office empower and enable alumni to create groups and drive communications.

Before implementing Affinity Circles, alumni were dependent on Alumni Relations staff to help them communicate to specific segments of the community. "Now, more of our constituents can be involved because they can drive communications when and how they want without needing to rely on our staff," said Martha Pirkle, director of alumni & family relations. "We are giving them a tool that really helps them build communities at their own pace, with the information they want to communicate with each other."

Today, the Alumni office sees a lot of organizing, event planning, and community building taking place on its affinity circle that previously would have involved staff time. Removing the Alumni office from the communication process empowers alumni volunteers to create groups and experiment with various ideas and get an indication if something is going to work based on how it is received on the LaGrange affinity circle. The strategy also benefits the Alumni office by allowing it to see what issues and events are gaining interest before dedicating resources to a particular group or event.

For example, a graduate from the 80's wanted to organize a reunion coinciding with Homecoming. The Alumni office referred the volunteer to the LaGrange affinity circle to gauge interest in the idea, where previously the burden would have fallen on the Alumni office to call and prepare mailings to that specific segment of the alumni community. By creating a group on the LaGrange affinity circle the volunteer was able to see an immediate response and experience a sense of ownership of the project.



A Cornerstone of Trust

The LaGrange College affinity circle differs from larger social networking sites where openness and transparency have proven to be problematic. The network is available exclusively to LaGrange College alumni, students, staff, trustees, and leadership council members who must be validated before they can sign in. The trusted nature of the network reinforces the close-knit relationships that LaGrange strives to build and maintain with students and alumni.

David Beard elaborated on the benefits of alumni participating in a trusted, authenticated online community. “Even if users don’t know all 7,000 people in the LaGrange College alumni database they know that they have something in common that gives them a basis for trusting their fellow alums with at least basic information. In addition, the ability to customize what is visible to the rest of the community gives users a sense of control over what personal information they are willing to share.”

The Affinity Circles Partnership

LaGrange College was able to take its affinity circle community live just one month after signing a contract with Affinity Circles. During the process, the Alumni office received prompt attention to any implementation issues or questions that arose. The way Affinity Circles involved the Alumni office in the process from start to finish ultimately helped them feel more invested in the product and the company.

“The LaGrange affinity circle is doing things we never conceived of doing without adding more staff. Trusted social networking has become a vibrant, branded part of our web site that lives and breathes without cost and attention on our part. We are one hundred percent satisfied with Affinity Circles and it’s only going to get better from here.”

*David Rowe
Vice President for Advancement
LaGrange College*

Affinity Circles can help your organization:

- ✓ Connect with your alumni community.
- ✓ Drive quality contact information back to your database.
- ✓ Increase the effectiveness of your marketing programs.
- ✓ Empower alumni to manage communications previously handled by your staff.
- ✓ Create revenue growth opportunities.
- ✓ Build your brand and demonstrate value to your most important constituency.

Contact us for a demo today!

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