

GENERATING CONTENT FOR *DARTMOUTH ALUMNI MAGAZINE* CLASS NOTES COLUMNS

September 4, 2016

OBJECTIVE: Provide class secretaries with ideas and procedures to help them generate more (and more interesting) material for their bimonthly Class Notes columns in the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine (DAM)*.

TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED: (i) Traditional methods of communicating with classmates; (ii) Other news-gathering techniques and resources; (iii) Column content.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF COMMUNICATING WITH CLASSMATES & GENERATING MATERIAL

- *Face-to-Face:* Nothing beats this personal touch. Try to meet or otherwise communicate with classmates periodically, both locally and whenever you travel to other geographic areas.
- *Phone:* Pick up the phone – it's the next best thing to a face-to-face meeting. If you reach a classmate's voicemail, remember that it's more effective to try again another time than to leave a message, which is easy to ignore.
- *Text:* If you have a classmate's cell phone number and are hesitant to call for whatever reason (e.g. you don't know him/her well or you are worried about disturbing him/her during work hours), consider sending a text asking the individual to give you a call, or asking when would be a good time for you to call.
- *Email:* Email outreaches can be effective; like voicemails, however, they can be easy to ignore or sometimes land in spam folders.
- *Green Card:* Before mobile phones there was the green postcard that would be included in class Newsletter and/or Dues mailings. This generally has become an unreliable relic of the past with low response rates and associated costs. That said, it's still worth employing judiciously on occasion to test response rates/effectiveness.

ADDITIONAL NEWS-GATHERING TECHNIQUES & RESOURCES

The role of class secretary is fulfilling because we play such an important role in keeping classmates connected to one another and to the College; it is also demanding, time consuming and, at times, frustrating. All of us know how discouraging it can be when our traditional news gathering efforts go unrewarded; do not despair, however, for there are other, less commonly employed outreach techniques you may find effective, as well as a whole host of Dartmouth news sites to fall back on.

- *Social Media:* Numerous secretaries have successfully leveraged Facebook and, to a lesser degree, LinkedIn to generate column content. Some do this through periodic posts on their class Facebook page requesting that classmates contact them by phone or email. Others take a more proactive approach by monitoring news mentions about or by classmates—on the personal pages of their Facebook friends, on their class Facebook page, and through their LinkedIn connections.
- *Birthday Emails:* Sending emails to classmates on their birthdays is a GREAT but underutilized way to gather material for your Class Notes, as well as to *briefly* convey timely class information

(e.g. reminders of upcoming milestone reunions, mini reunions, class day-of-the-year virtual reunions, etc.). David Eichman and Robin Shaffer, '82 co-class secretaries, consider this tactic to be “the BEST way to reach out and encourage classmates to engage.” We strongly recommend that you leverage the Class List provided every fall by Theresa D’Orsi. Format the list so that you can sort by the birthday column and make a habit of reaching out to every classmate on his/her birthday (Note: Shared birthdays should be combined into one email).

- *Recruits/Agents*: Consider borrowing a page from your DCF playbook and assemble a small, manageable group of classmates who in effect act as news gathering agents. The team you recruit will ideally represent a diverse cross section of the class, both in terms of friends/affinity groups and geography.
- *Dartmouth News & Events*: On those hopefully rare occasions when the column submission deadline is looming and you find yourself desperate for material, news about the College will never let you down. We recommend that you visit now.dartmouth.edu and familiarize yourself with the site, which has a plethora of College news and information as well as an “Events” section with articles on past events (upcoming events can be found at dartmouth.edu/events). Click on the “Subscribe” tab to sign up for the Dartmouth Now Daily Update and/or the VOX Weekly email newsletter, which is delivered every Thursday and highlights the best of Dartmouth in stories, videos and photos from the previous week. Other good resources include The Dartmouth daily newspaper (thedartmouth.com) and the College’s athletics site (Dartmouthsports.com).
- *Dartmouth Class History*: Draw on your undergraduate years by thinking about specific events (e.g. freshman orientation, senior Green Key weekend, Winter Carnival activities, sporting events, etc.) that served to pull your class together, and strengthen your connections with classmates and the College.

BEST PRACTICES

- *Get Personal*: There is a direct relationship between outreach and response rates. As discussed above, some tactics have proven to be more effective than others. But it’s also important to remember that the more personal the message, the more likely you will be to generate goodwill, establish rapport and hear back from classmates. This means taking time to do a little research on individuals who are acquaintances at best, or who you don’t know at all. Refer back to your Freshman Book, Yearbook and/or Reunion Yearbook for personal information that you can leverage in your phone calls, texts and emails.
- *Share*: There will be times when you have an embarrassment of riches and can’t accommodate all the news that’s fit to print in your column because of your word limit. This is a great opportunity to share information with your newsletter editor—he/she is not bound by text constraints and can further engage classmates by contacting them for photos.
- *Engage the Disaffected*: Seek out news from under-the-radar classmates. This will serve to keep your columns fresh and reconnect disaffected individuals with your class and the College. Work with your newsletter editor to build a spreadsheet that keeps track of classmates who have

been written up in the past; this will take time and effort on the front end but will pay off handsomely on the back end for you and your future class secretaries.

- *Post Columns on Class Websites:* If you have a class website, coordinate with your webmaster and have him/her post your bimonthly columns. Talk to your fellow class officers and reach a consensus about timing—some classes will want to post their columns when print issues are expected to arrive in mailboxes, while others may prefer to post as soon as the column has been finalized by the editors of the *DAM*.
- *Best Practice Sharing from Class Activity Reports:* Peruse class secretaries' comments in the Best Practice Sharing reports that are prepared annually for Class Officers Weekend. Lots of good ideas are there for the taking!
- *Accumulate Ideas & Material:* Generate ideas and gather material for your bimonthly *DAM* columns on an ongoing basis; do NOT wait until the submission deadline every other month. If possible, draft a paragraph on each accumulated piece of material on an ongoing basis (e.g. biweekly) as well. Excess material, if not time specific, can always be carried over to future Class Notes columns.

CONTENT IDEAS, HOOKS & THEMES

There are an infinite number of ways to approach your Class Notes columns. Generally speaking, these fall into the following categories, or combination of categories:

- Un-themed classmate news
- Themed classmate news
- General news about the College
- Alerts and updates about class-specific business (e.g. DCF; Class Project; Reunions/Mini-Reunions; etc.)
- Philosophical topic of interest that somehow relates to one's class and/or the College (this can be your best write-up of the year, if handled artfully)

Here are some specific content ideas/themes/hooks for your consideration going forward:

- *Guest Column:* Take a load off once or twice a year and ask a classmate doing interesting work or community service to pen a guest column, in whole or in part.
- *Q&A:* Ask classmates to respond to a thought-provoking question (e.g. "If you were bringing your child(ren) to campus, where would you take him/her/them and why?" and suggest a word limit on responses (e.g. 25 words or less will likely increase your response rate). Here's a unique question/challenge that Rick Beyer, '78 class secretary, used in the July-August 2015 issue of the *DAM* and that proved to be highly effective: "Can you tell your life story in six words?"
- *Commonalities:* A good way to target classmates for news is to identify something they share in common. It can be anything: first-year dormmates; undergraduate teammates; classmates who live in the same city or who live abroad; classmates who share a birthday or occupation; authors or artists; extreme sports competitors; and so on.

- *Season Specific*: Look ahead two months when your Class Notes are due to arrive in mailboxes, then think about what holidays, family activities, etc. typically occur around those times. Summer vacations, New Year's resolutions, extreme variations in weather in different geographic areas where classmates reside, etc. may all serve as hooks around which you can build your columns.