

**Alumni Relations– why do we do this?**  
**Geoffrey Sauer, Alumni Relations Coordinator**  
**Flinders University**

In this presentation, the “we” are alumni practitioners and volunteers, and the “this” is alumni relations. My purpose is to provide an insight into what alumni relations is.

Universities have an enormous reservoir of goodwill, and not just amongst their alumni, but in the community at large. The problem is that the goodwill remains just that, an untapped reservoir, unless some effort is actually made to tap into it.

Governments in many countries have made changes (in line with the prevailing neo-liberal approach to economic policy) that have led to the “marketization” of universities, and that too has led to the recognition of the fact that to tap into other sources of income (or influence), relationships need to be built with all constituencies and, perhaps more than with any other constituencies, the strongest relationship must be with the alumni.

The common thread in what we do is people, and in particular, the building and maintaining of relationships between our alumni and the university.

Whilst many still think alumni relations is just an endless series of reunions and events, it is not, and what strategies are pursued, are pursued for specific reasons.

What is alumni relations really about? How can it be defined?

1. Building lasting, mutually beneficial relationships between the university and alumni. How do we do this?
2. What do successful alumni relations programs lead to?
3. Who is responsible for alumni relations?

A “no brainer” - the achievement of a university's goals will be made significantly easier if it has the committed support of its alumni.

Alumni relations programs must aim to build support amongst a university's alumni to assist in obtaining a diverse base of resources that, in turn, will ensure success in what is now a global education marketplace. Alumni cannot do anything for universities, unless they understand that they are cared about, that their support is needed, and that they understand why their support is needed.

Developing this understanding cannot be done in isolation – it must be integrated into institutional marketing and fundraising strategies – there can be no mixed messages.

## **Geoffrey Sauer**

Geoff is Alumni Relations Coordinator at Flinders University in South Australia, where his work focuses on building and developing links between the University and its alumni, especially international alumni. He is one of Australia's most experienced advancement professionals with an extensive background in alumni relations in Australian higher education, and a particular focus on Southeast Asia.

From 1985 to 2000, he was Alumni Relations Director at The University of Adelaide.

He has been President of the Association of Development and Alumni Professionals in Education – South Australia, and a member of ADAPE's national executive. From 1989 to 1997, he was a member of the Australian University Alumni Council Committee, including a three year term as President.

From 2001 to 2006, he was Executive Officer of the Australia Malaysia Cultural Foundation and in 2001, on behalf of the Foundation and the Australian Government, compiled and edited "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and South East Asia 1951-2001: The Malaysian Australian Perspective".

He is Vice-President of the Australia Malaysia Business Council South Australia and a member of the AMBC National Executive.

In 1998, Geoff was one of the founders of the bi-ennial Australian Universities International Alumni Convention (Adelaide 1998, Kuching 2000, Melbourne 2002, Hong Kong 2004, Brisbane 2006).

He is an alumnus of Flinders, and in November 2008, he will complete an MA in Asian Studies at Murdoch University.