D1 Evaluation of Alumni Contact in Forensic Science Programs

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After attending this presentation, attendees will evaluate ways to maintain communication with alumni. Increased communication with alumni will benefit faculty, students, alumni, and laboratory personnel.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by seeking to bridge the gap between academia and forensic laboratories. Alumni of forensic science university programs gain employment in forensic laboratories which allows them the opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of forensic science curriculum in light of knowledge and skills required by their job.

Current students become alumni when they graduate. They share similar experiences but at different points in time. Because alumni have traveled the same path that current students are walking, alumni are a resource to assist current students and faculty. This resource is only useful if communication between alumni and the program exists.

In order to make better use of this valuable resource and better evaluate success of the graduates in their jobs, the forensic science programs try to remain in communication with alumni. Graduate and employer satisfaction surveys allow faculty an opportunity to evaluate whether or not their classes are preparing the students for their jobs based on the answers from the graduates who have been employed for at least a year and their immediate supervisors. Faculty are also able to call upon the expertise of alumni, employed in the forensic science field, to offer their advice, guest lecture, attend seminar series, or judge research posters. Alumni benefit from remaining in contact with the program with opportunities for collaboration on research projects. They also benefit from research conducted by students in their laboratories when they host an intern. Laboratory personnel benefit from increased communication by being able to advertise services and continuing education opportunities offered by the laboratory.

Forensic science programs at several universities struggle to maintain meaningful contact with their alumni. The most common methods many programs use to maintain contact with alumni are surveys, Facebook[®], newsletters, personal communications, alumni receptions at national meetings, and emails. Prior to graduation, the students are informed of ways to stay in contact with their programs when they move from place to place, job to job, change email addresses, or change cell phone numbers. However, during all these life changes, alumni forget to inform the program of the changes. This hinders communication with the alumni. Since continued contact with the alumni is a problem, finding the answers for why alumni do not maintain continued contact can be tricky. Those that are most likely to return an emailed survey are already in continued contact with the program. For those who would likely not return a survey, alternative methods of contact need to be identified.

Literature on alumni relations gives insight into the general principles involved in maintaining a high level of contact with graduates. Improvements identified in the literature include: including alumni in program activities and events with students; including alumni in advisory positions with student organizations; creating an electronic newsletter; and creating online continuing education courses. These principles could be adapted for use by the forensic science program.

Successful strategies for improving communication would benefit forensic science programs. Ultimately turning the alumni into stakeholders for maintaining communication with the program is a worthy goal. The improvements proposed for increasing communication with the alumni should be implemented in phases. Prior to implementation, a representative sample of the alumni should be surveyed to ensure the improvements will meet their needs as well as the program's needs.

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