Cultivating the Alumni Base: Friend-raising to fundraising
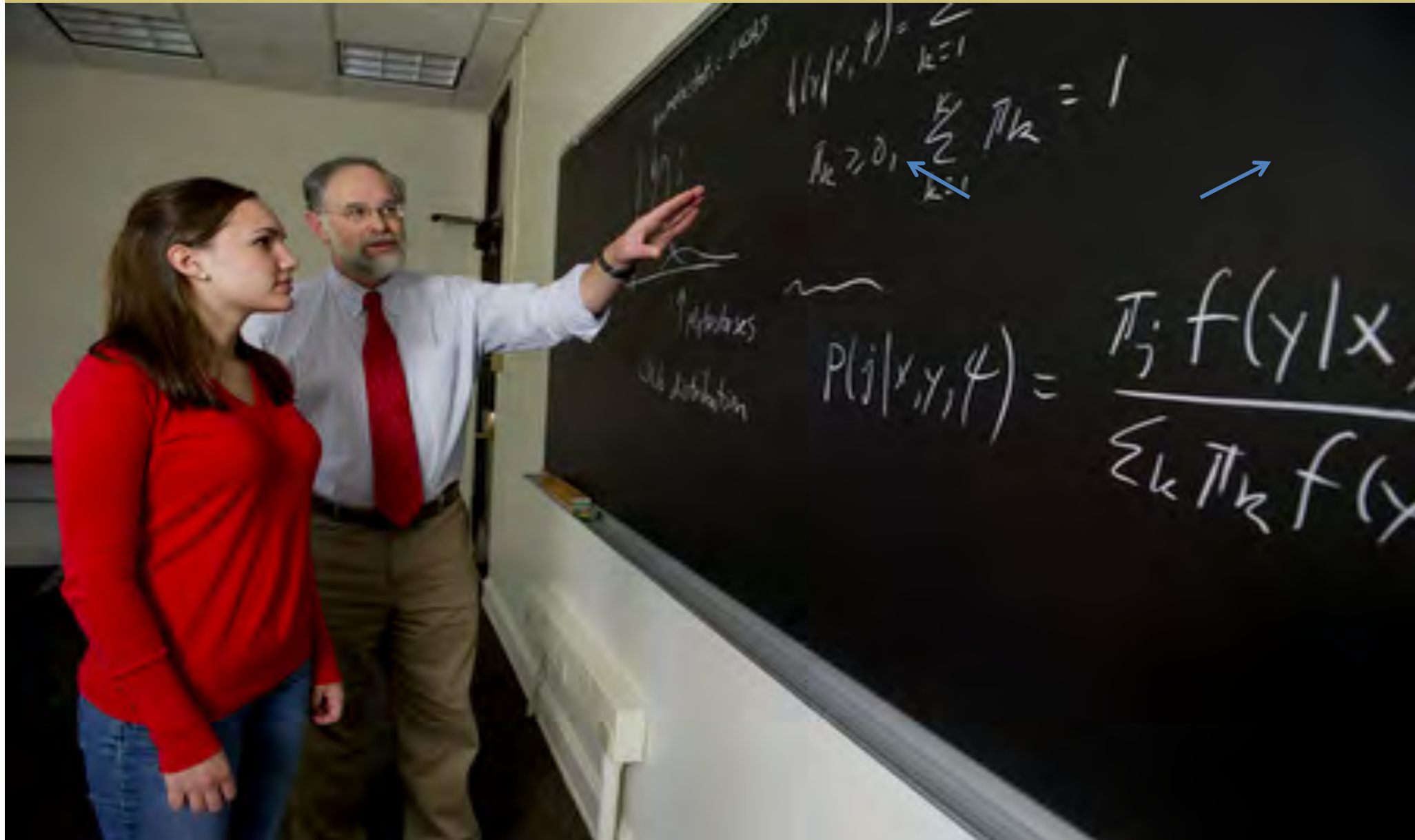
Laura Carlson
University of Notre Dame

CGS Summer Workshop, July 15, 2019, San Diego
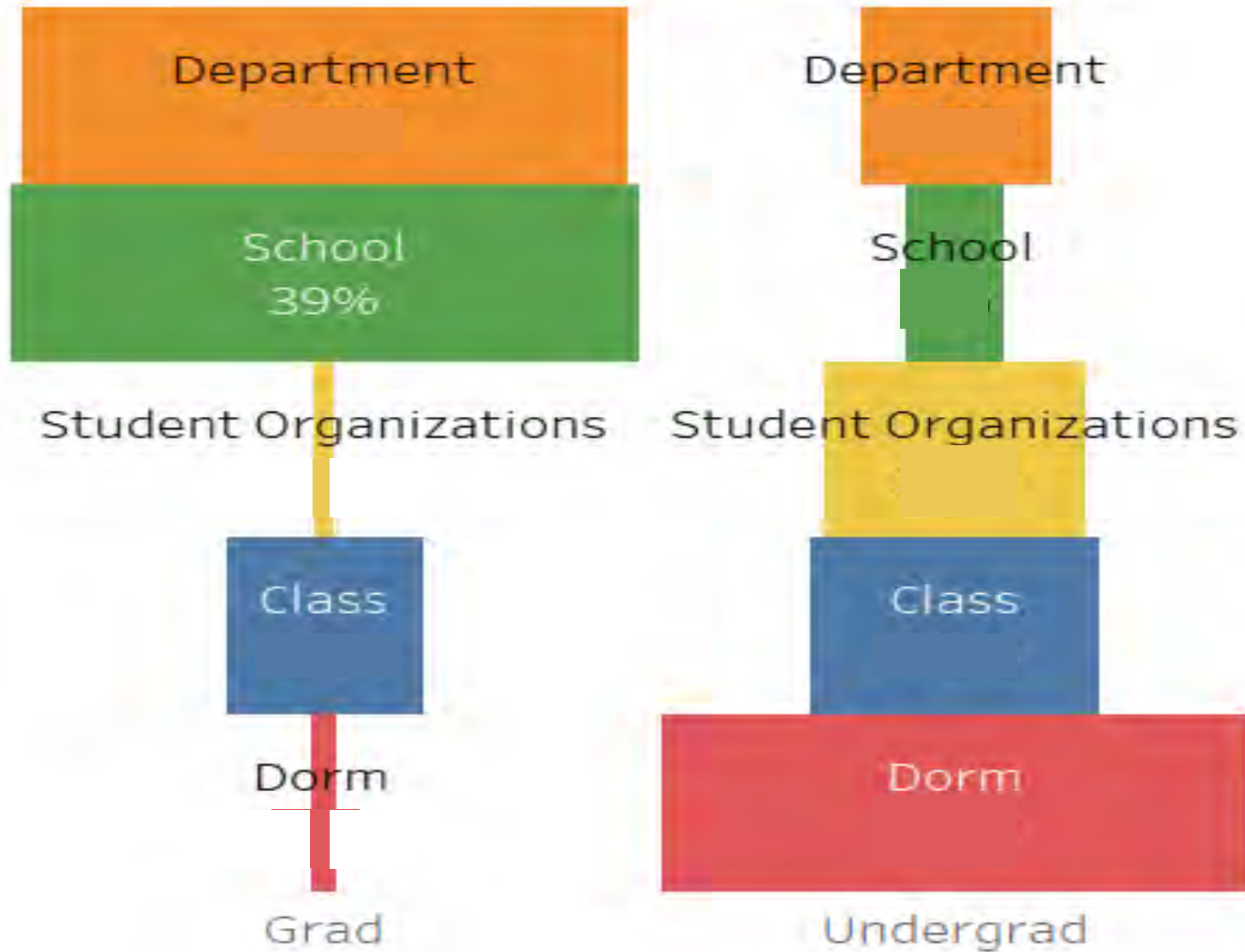
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The Big Challenge

With whom do you affiliate?
(Alumni Association Survey)

The foundational question:

Do our graduate students define themselves as alumni of our institutions?

We hope they do….

Untapped Resources:

- Mentoring

- Intern/Externship experiences

- Financial Support

We hope they do….

Their degree of affiliation can be taken as a reflection of their sense of belonging in your community

Connection = Barometer of inclusion

Sense of belonging over time
Grad Life Survey

Sense of Belonging

	2013	2016
Discipline	3.74	4.09
Program	3.62	3.93
Student Community	2.91	3.18
Notre Dame	3.08	3.27
Local Community	2.40	2.67
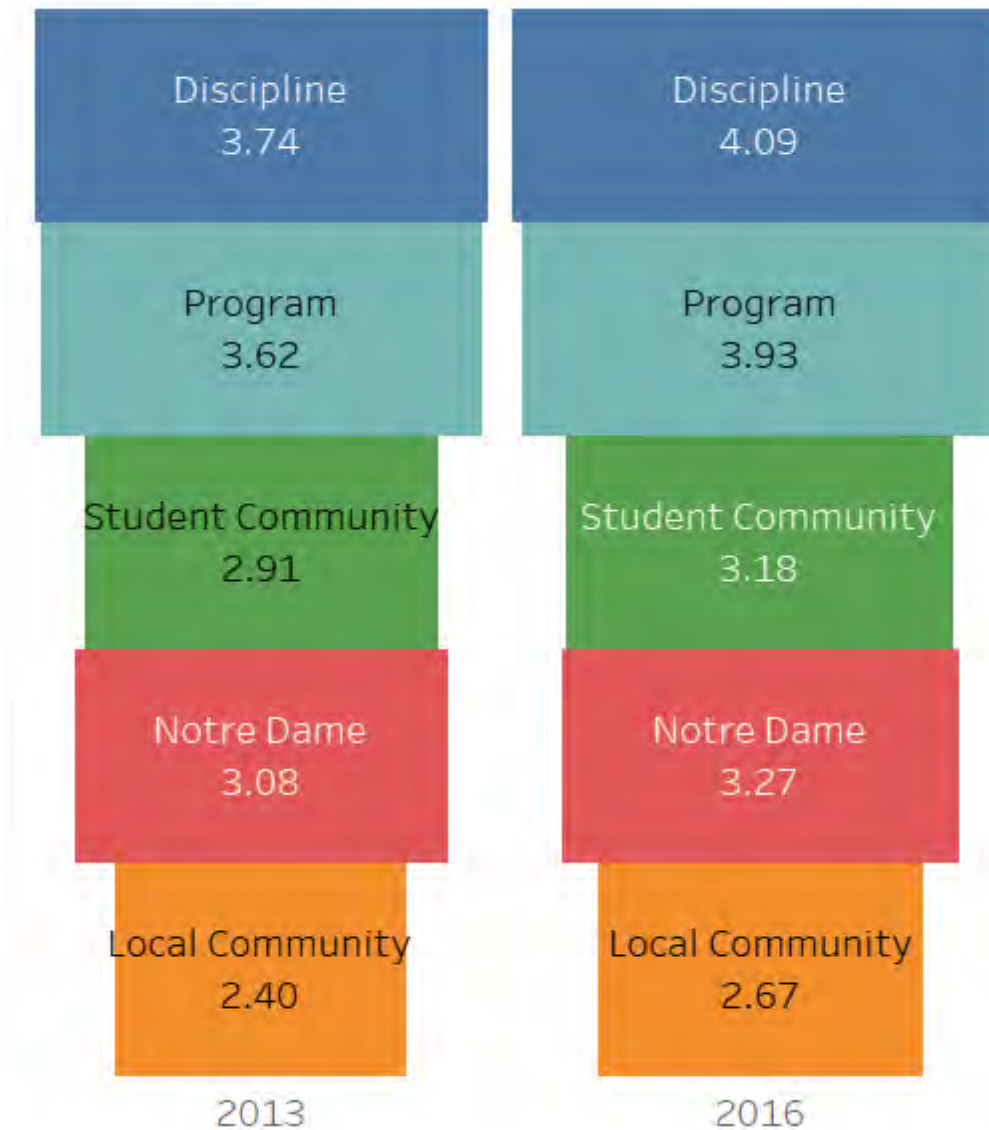
Goals:

In this session we will:

- Identify and discuss hurdles for building a grad alumni base
- Identify whether tactics successful at the undergrad level can be applied to grad alum
- Learn about initiatives that worked and those that didn't

Exercise #1:

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My list of hurdles:

1. Grad alum don't care/affiliate with grad school
2. Development is not a helpful partner
3. No contact information
4. Some alumni associations doesn't think of grad students as alums
5. Grad alums may think you only want money
6. People are busy and don't want to be bothered
7. They may ask "why now" – is this the first outreach to them since they left?

How to approach your grad alums: Know your structure

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Many units can lay claim to contact information for graduate alumni

Alumni Association
Development

University Relations

Career Services
Graduate School

Ideally – a central repository of contact information
single and up-to-date and full access

What is standing in the way?

Each unit has its own responsibilities and leadership

Each unit has its own reason for outreach:
    Alumni Association (engagement)
    Graduate Careers (outcomes)
    Development (fundraising)

Graduate School (all of these reasons and more…)
    This means that no one may want to partner with us…..

So, how do you navigate this?
You need to cultivate these relationships

Alumni Association

History of the Partnership:

2009:   Non-existent

2019:   They helped me write this talk

          A staff of 37

                Grad alum efforts fall under Director of
                Professional and Alumni Education Programs

Alumni Association:
What is starting to work

Alumni Association

Living Alumni: Grad: 41,787;   Undergrad: 102,743

Engagement:

Irish Compass – networking platform

post jobs; set up mentor/mentee matches

Total enrolled: 17209

- 11,455 alumni (% 15 grad alum)
- 5232 current undergrad;   522 current grads

ND Clubs – 223 domestic and 50 abroad

No current tracking of undergrad vs. grad

Alumni Association:
What hasn't worked

Reunion

- No stand alone, university level programming
- Perhaps local program level reunions?

Still a lot of work to do here.........

Challenge: Move from enabling access to grad alum for initiatives designed for undergrads to customized initiatives tailored around grad alum wants and needs

Exercise #2:

Can we use successful undergrad alum materials for grad alum?

Checklist on how to connect

Discuss whether any of these will work at the graduate level. Why or why not?

Can they be tweaked?

Are there other ways to connect?

Alumni Assocation:
Ask: what do grad alum want?

Alum Assoc Survey, 2017 (N ranges from 1200-2000 by question)

Most interested in career and professional development and value online learning offerings relevant to their professional areas and expertise.

They are more interested in connecting with alumni, parents, and friends who work in their profession and who they consider to be professional peers.

They are less interested in connecting with those who share their life stage or attended Notre Dame around the same time they did.

They are less likely than other groups to want to participate in ND-related activities with their friends—but more interested in meeting new alumni and friends.

Less likely to report following ND athletics or attending an athletic event.

What we have learned so far

- You may need to educate your alumni association on the unique needs/wants/stages of life for grad alum

- You may need to convince them that grad alums are alums too.

- This will all take time.

SO -- Your strategy for building your alumni network cannot be restricted to this

There are other partners who can help

Career Services

History of the Partnership:

2009:   Undergrad focused
         Ad hoc consultation for grads who found them

2019:   They helped me write this talk
         Now -- a dedicated team – Grad Career Services
         (Director and 4 consultants)

Grad Career Services: What has worked

Participation in CGS Pathways Project

Impetus for us to focus on alumni, collect contact information, and begin coordinating databases across campus.

Our alum network expanded in 2 ways:
1. Outcome data: from 0, 5 ➔ 0, 3, 5, 8, 15
2. Also have data on satisfaction, experience, etc

Grad Career Services: What has worked

We learned: Our grad alums are open to interaction:

CGS Pathways Year	Completion Rate			
	3 Years Out	8 Years Out	15 Years Out	Overall
1	56%	59%	60%	58%
2	55%	57%	58%	56%

Grad Career Services:
What has worked

We learned: They want to give feedback about their experiences and they want to help

67% were willing to have their response data attributed to them individually and linked to their administrative records, confined to the project team.

2017 Alumni Survey					2018 Alumni Survey			
Years Since Graduation	Total Survey Responses	Willing To Share	% Willing To Share		Years Since Graduation	Total Survey Responses	Willing To Share	% Willing To Share
3	117	77	66%		3	121	72	60%
8	93	59	63%		8	78	55	71%
15	58	43	74%		15	57	45	79%
TOTAL	268	179	67%		TOTAL	256	172	67%

Grad Career Services: What hasn't worked

Career Fair

- At ND, the event is LARGE and students are not often able to discuss their specific talents as they may differ from UG talent

- Many employers who attend are specifically UG-recruiters

Instead: "Coffee & Careers"

- Event open on the morning of large-scale Career Fair, geared towards Ph.D. & masters hiring only

- Companies send separate representatives or equip current recruiters to answer advanced degree hiring questions

- MANY Graduate School alums will represent their organization

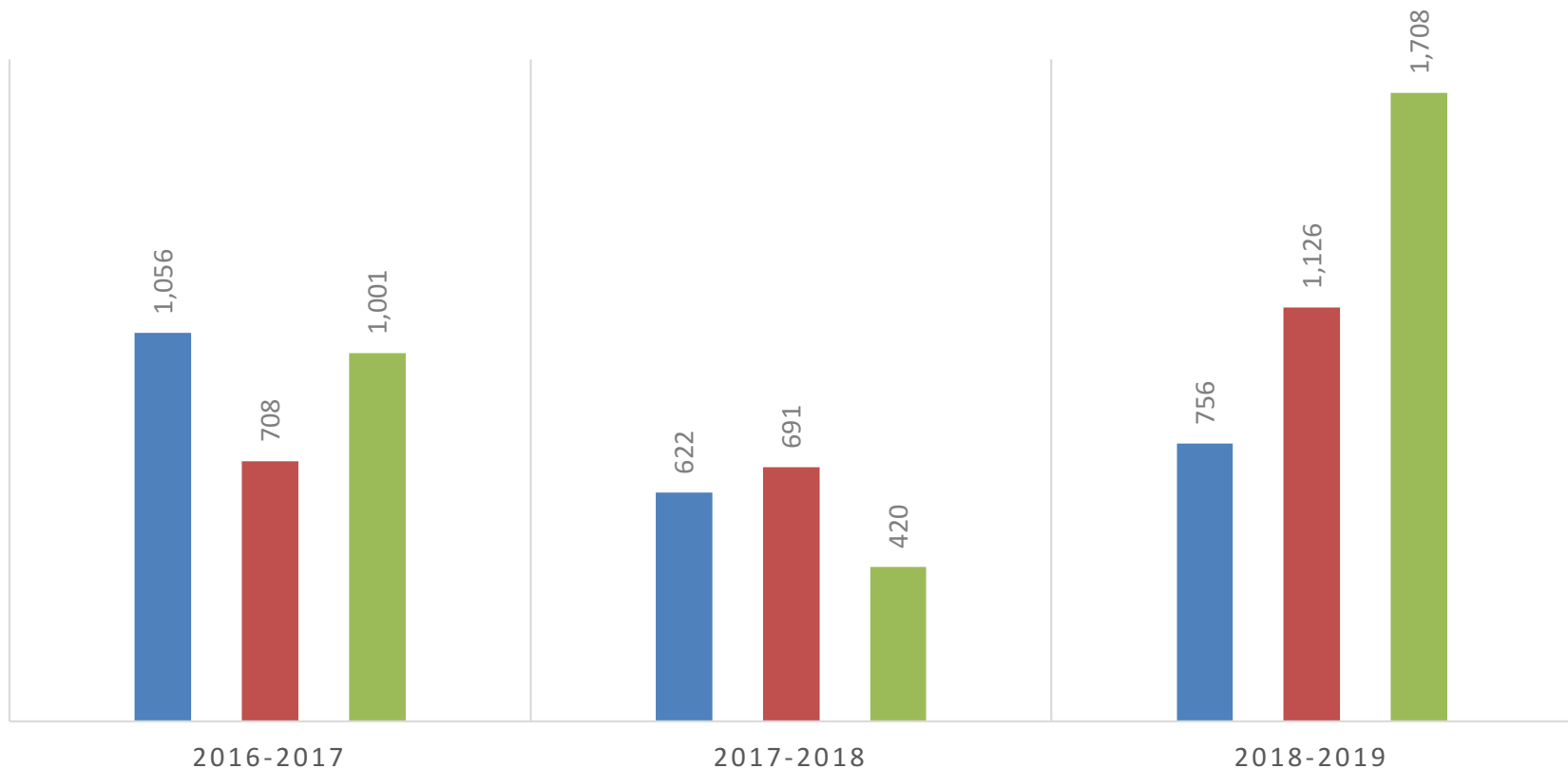- Shorter event, more conducive to graduate student schedule

Grad Career Services: Maybe it will work?

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Get to know grad students before they become alum

STUDENT TOUCHPOINTS

■ Email   ■ In-Person   ■ Event

2016-2017: Email 1,056 | In-Person 708 | Event 1,001
2017-2018: Email 622 | In-Person 691 | Event 420
2018-2019: Email 756 | In-Person 1,126 | Event 1,708

What grad students want
Fall Student Engagement Survey

- Fall Student Engagement Survey (2018)
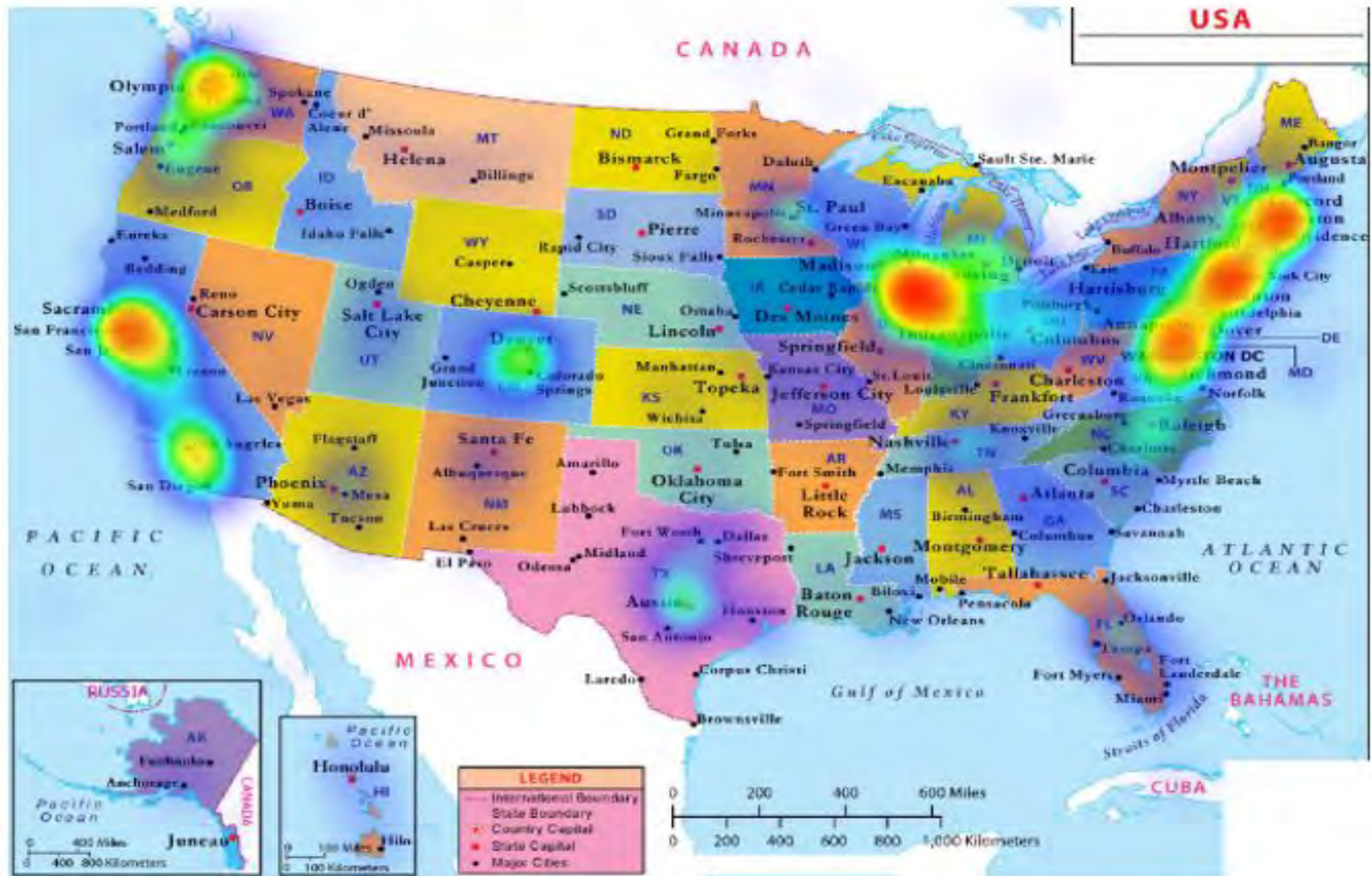- Sent to grad students (~2,500); response rate 32%

Types of roles they want to pursue (ranked):

Academic, Industry, Not-for-Profit, Entrepreneurial

Location(s) where they want to work/live:

Interactive Heat Map

Please select up to five cities, states, or regions in the U.S.A. where you would find interest in starting a career. (First Choice ONLY)

Grad Career Services: Maybe it will work?

- Career Treks
  - Piloted four (4) Career Treks for 62 grad students
  - "Day in the Life"
    - Silicon Valley (8 organizations)
    - Indianapolis (Eli Lilly)
    - Crane (NavSea)
    - Chicago (McKinsey & Argonne)

- East-Coast Relocation
  - Director Rob Coloney relocated full-time to the East Coast to begin to build a pipeline for graduate student-specific hiring for Ph.D. & masters students between D.C. & Boston

- Grad Career now offers consultations with Grad Alumni

Development

History of the Partnership

2009:   Advisory Council, shared with ND Research
         Interactions all undergrad focused

2019:   They did not helped me write this talk
         Liaison to Grad School (shared)

Development:
What has started to work

Fundraising for financial aid includes grad

Include grad students in profiles & pitches

Advisory Council

    Alums (undergrad and grad) who give:

        Time, talent and treasure

    Share with ND Research

Development:
What has started to work

Salesforce (just this fall)

- CRM cloud-based database of alumni records
- Equally Accessible by Grad Career Services and Development
- 80% of engagement survey respondents signed up
- Also used to track employer relations
- Used by Alumni Association also

This took new leadership and cooperation

Take home messages

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Feel free to contact me to strategize about how to apply these ideas to your campus environment:

lcarlson@nd.edu

Build Campus Infrastructure & Partnerships

- Clarify functions and needs
- Build trust

Build your alum network before they are alums

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- Focus on Community, Inclusion, Support
- Provide resources that add value
- Track sense of belonging

Be patient and opportunistic

- 10 years in so far…….. just really starting

Closing Exercise

At your tables, discuss difficulties that you anticipate in implementing some/any of the strategies you heard about:

- Which ones seem possible?
- Which ones seem impossible?