Southeastern Institute
of Research

Virginia Commonwealth University

College of Humanities and Sciences

2013 Alumni Study: Executive Summary

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This Executive Summary presents a brief overview of the 2013 Alumni Study methodology, findings, and implications. For complete study details, please refer to the results presentation prepared by SIR.

OBJECTIVES

The overall goals of this research initiative included identifying each of the following:

- **Overall Image of the College:** Identify how alumni currently perceive the College.

- **Perceived Image and Perceived Value of a Humanities and Sciences Education**: How do alumni currently view their education in today's world?

- **Perceived Value and Impact of a VCU Humanities and Sciences Education:** How has the VCU education served alumni?

- **Alumni Relationship Needs and Issues Related to the College**: What are the greatest needs and issues VCU College of Humanities and Sciences' alumni have today?

- **Expectations**: Identify alumni's current <u>expectations</u> of the College.

- **Performance**: Assess the College's perceived <u>performance</u> in delivering on these same "expectation attributes" – how do members rate the College's current performance in each area of expectation?

- **Performance Gaps**: Identify and rank, in terms of importance, the gaps between alumni's expectations and their perceived performance of the College in each area.

- **Alumni Satisfaction and Drivers of Satisfaction:** Measure alumni's overall perception and satisfaction with the College.

- **Alumni Engagement:** Measure overall engagement of the alumni with the College.

- **Overall Positioning and Key Messaging:** Using the information and insights related to the objectives as stated above, identify the optional brand positioning and related key messages for the College.

- **Communications:** Assess how alumni rate the College's current communications targeting them.

- **Sub-segment Perspectives**: Understand all of the above from different types of alumni segments (i.e., by engagement segments, alumni association member status, gender, age, generation, location, major, etc.).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

SIR conducted an online survey of VCU's College of Humanities and Sciences alumni from August 12-August 23, 2013. An email with the survey link was sent to 16,948 alumni on August 12, 2013, and a reminder was sent on August 19, 2013. A total of 1,595 surveys were completed for a response rate of 9%. Study results contain a margin of error of +/- 2.34 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

In order to profile VCU College of Humanities and Sciences' alumni respondents, the following demographic information was collected: gender, ethnicity, household income and age. Study results indicate that respondents fall into the following demographic categories: 58% were female, 78% self-identified as Caucasian, the average household income was $85,000, and the average age was 44.

EIGHT KEY INSIGHTS

Eight key insights and implications were drawn from study results, which are presented in the table below.

Insight:	Implication:
1. Only 42% of respondents believe society finds their degree valuable and only 57% of respondents would pursue their degree again.	Most respondents find the skills gained from a Humanities and Sciences degree helpful but some (especially Millennials and lower engaged respondents) do not see the value of the degree itself. Promoting success stories of alumni to current students and young alumni may help them see the value of their degree. These stories should focus on how the Humanities and Sciences "skills" learned at VCU led them to become the successful person they are today.
2. VCU's alumni are pleased with the institution and give a strong overall rating of 80% and high Net Promoter Score* (NPS) of 26%.	By all overall measures, alumni are satisfied with VCU. Highly engaged alumni are three times as likely to promote VCU. Figuring out how to better connect with lower engaged alumni will help make them feel more involved and could turn detractors into promoters.

Insight:	Implication:
3. Respondents rate VCU attributes high for importance but slightly lower for performance, creating some gaps as large as 40% that should be addressed.	Explore perceptions around internships and career services. While there are other gaps that should also be addressed, these are rated as most important with the largest gaps. Showcasing the success of alumni and helping young alumni get into the job market elevates the degree's perceived status from within.
4. VCU's curriculum, quality of faculty and critical thinking are the strongest drivers of satisfaction; meaning as VCU increases satisfaction with these, overall satisfaction will also increase.	Regression analysis shows quality of faculty, critical thinking skills and curriculum are the strongest drivers of satisfaction. These three attributes are also present in gap analysis; meaning that closing these gaps will give VCU a large return on investment and will increase overall satisfaction with VCU.
5. Satisfaction with VCU Alumni is highest at 67% among those who are more engaged.	We know that alumni with higher levels of engagement are more satisfied with VCU Alumni. What we have learned is that Millennials are significantly more likely to be interested in both a department reunion and a Humanities and Sciences reunion. This generation craves networking opportunities. Reunions would get Millennials highly engaged right out of college and keep them engaged, which could potentially boost perceived value in their degree.
6. Millennials value their VCU network the most.	Younger alumni value their VCU network more and utilize career services more. Do older alumni feel too far removed from VCU to value their VCU network anymore or do they not know how to connect? The panel may be a great way to figure out how to get older alumni more involved.
7. VCU specific communications are read and well received more than College of Humanities and Sciences communications.	Respondents seem to be most interested in alumni/student research and success stories. Use these types of features to get people more interested and satisfied with both your electronic and print communications, as they are seen as the most useful communications.
8. 95% of all respondents understand that they are a part of the College of Humanities and Sciences but only 2% identify with it.	Stick with what students know and love; they know you as the College of Humanities and Sciences and they love all the skills they've gained through VCU's program. This should be used to VCU's advantage as they begin to work from the inside out in creating a valued and recognized brand, centered around how the College of Humanities and Sciences makes a personal impact in shaping an individual.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Engagement: There is a large market of alumni who are interested in being highly engaged but are not. Improving communications about services offered will improve perceived misperceptions and in turn, increase engagement.

Branding: Given the research findings and limited dollars for an external branding campaign, it will be hard to build a compelling and differentiating brand at this point in time. You need to craft a more compelling story and build an army of apostles to deliver the message. So start from the inside out and tie your brand to VCU as a whole. Create a more meaningful sense of what you offer and the value you deliver to your customers – *students/alumni.* Focus on engagement as a surrogate measure of _brand strength_ – relevancy (importance), believability, uniqueness. Immediately begin to close the gap between those who want to be engaged, and those who actually are, through communications and by increasing satisfaction with your services (i.e. offering better alumni services, holding events etc.)

Messaging: Focus less on the size of the College of Humanities and Sciences and the amount of programs offered and more on what you deliver; the benefits and the personal impact – *perspectives and skills gained, lives shaped etc.* and how you do it - *distinguished faculty in an urban setting.* This messaging will become the articulation of your brand.