An ALANA Student Directory Can Boost Your Retention Rates

by Dr. Charles Taylor

The purpose of this article is to show campuses how to develop a student directory that can become a tremendous resource for students, staff and faculty.

A Well-Designed Directory Helps Create a Sense of Community on Campus

Simply put, a directory is a listing of people and how to connect with them. A directory may be posted online, emailed to specific people or groups, or distributed in hard copy form. The essential function of a directory is to enable people to find what they need quickly. An ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) Student Directory is no different; its function is to allow students of color to find each other and for others to find them. Reasons for these connections may vary from diversity recruitment to the desire to build new friendships.

Whatever the reason may be, a directory is a tool that, if used correctly, will enhance the sense of community on campus. It allows students to connect based on interest and to be contacted by others. Ideally, the directory should be compiled before the fall semester starts and distributed during a special orientation. The faster students have access to it, the sooner they will be able to benefit from it.

I would recommend that you make copies of the ALANA Student Directory available to student services staff or post it online for them. You may be pleasantly surprised at the creative uses such staff will make of the directory. You may also want to make copies available online to the faculty and other campus administrators. You may find the ALANA Student Directory becoming a "must-have" on your campus.

Use This Survey Tool for Gathering Student Data

By working with the registrar, admissions, minority services and other student services offices, you should be able to obtain the addresses of all new and continuing students of color. The survey can be emailed and snail mailed to students during the summer. Plan to do additional email and mail follow-up after your initial contact has gone out, as this will increase your response rate. If your response rate is still unsatisfactory, you may want to wait until students are back on campus to complete your survey and concentrate on those students who have not completed it.

To ensure a "filled" directory, you may want to set up a two or three day "telemarketing" room where you have either volunteers or work-study students contact students and

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actually fill out the forms over the phone. Or you may wish to send out a Facebook or email blast.

Since most of the information included in the directory is "public" information, issues of confidentiality should not be a problem. However, to prepare for such questions, consult with a legal advisor or law professor on ways to ensure confidentiality. Find out how this issue is handled when the traditional student campus directory is compiled.

Below is an example of a survey that has worked well on college campuses and may be used as a guide in forming questions for either an online or paper survey. An online survey is encouraged because that's how students communicate these days.

Student Survey

STUDENT SURVEY
(Purpose and Instructions for completing)

_____ is interested in improving the quality of services delivered to students
(Name of your program)

of color. Your response to this survey will assist our office in planning programs and activities that reflect your interests and enhance your academic career. This survey will also allow us to compile a directory that will include information about you and your fellow students to encourage networking. Please answer each item below. Remember to sign the statement at the end of the survey to be included in the Student Directory.

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DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Name _____
2. Email Address_____
3. Home Address_____
4. Home Telephone or Cell_____
5. Campus Address _____
6. Campus Telephone or Cell_____

7. Ethnic Group (check one)

____African American
____Asian American
____Latino
____Native American
____White American
____Other (fill in)_____

8. Sex

____ Female   ____ Male

9. Year in School

____FR____SO____JR____SR____Other_____

SKILL BANK

10. I possess (check all that apply):

____ Writing/journalism experience
____ Student government experience
____ Photography and video experience
____ Media experience (list type) _____
____ Research experience
____ Artistic ability (list type) _____
____ Technology skills (describe) _____
____ Other (describe)_____

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INTERESTS IN PERSONAL GROWTH

11. Check level of interest in each item

	Interest		
Item	High	Some	Little
Leadership training	_____	_____	_____
Making new friends	_____	_____	_____
Working on a newsletter	_____	_____	_____
Joining a fraternity/Sorority	_____	_____	_____
Cross-cultural activities	_____	_____	_____
Student government	_____	_____	_____
Serving on a committee	_____	_____	_____
Community Service	_____	_____	_____
Working with computers	_____	_____	_____
Forming study groups	_____	_____	_____
Mentor relationships	_____	_____	_____
Social/Cultural activities	_____	_____	_____
Other (fill in)_____	_____	_____	_____

STAYING INFORMED

12. What is the likelihood that each of the following would be effective in keeping you informed about campus activities?

	Likelihood		
Method	High	Some	Little
Campus Newspaper	_____	_____	_____
Bulletin Boards	_____	_____	_____
Campus TV	_____	_____	_____
Student Organization	_____	_____	_____
Newsletter	_____	_____	_____
Posters	_____	_____	_____
Mailbox flyer	_____	_____	_____
Word of mouth	_____	_____	_____
University website	_____	_____	_____
Email	_____	_____	_____
Twitter	_____	_____	_____
Facebook invite	_____	_____	_____
Other (fill in)_____	_____	_____	_____

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SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

13. Which of the following social activities would you attend? (check all that apply)

____Theatre
____Sports events
____Movies
____Outdoor activities
____Dance performances
____Lectures/Speakers
____Nightclub/party events
____Art exhibits
____Concerts/live music
____Other _____

*Which of the following types of movies would you attend? (check all that apply)

____Horror
____Mystery
____Comedy
____Documentaries
____Science fiction
____Musical
____Independent
____Other _____

14. Number your top three music choices:

____Soul
____Jazz
____Rock
____Reggae
____Gospel
____Country
____Rap
____Hip Hop
____Spoken Word
____Blues
____Other _____

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15. Number your top three speaker choices:

____Minority/race relations issues
____LGBT issues
____International/global issues
____Religious issues
____Political issues
____Gender issues
____Women's issues
____Civil rights issues
____Educational issues
____Comedy
____Other(s) _____

16. What is your major? _____

17. In which course would you like to have tutors or study groups? List as many as appropriate.
____History
____Business
____Math
____Science
____Foreign language
____English
____Computer science
____Other(s)_____
____None

18. I am able to tutor the following subjects. Fill in only if you made a B or better in the course. List as many courses as appropriate. (If you are unable to tutor, skip this question).
____History
____Business
____Math
____Science
____Foreign language
____English
____Computer science
____Other(s)_____

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19. General Comments: Share any comments, interests, or needs that weren't covered in the survey that you would like your peers to know about.

20. You have my permission to include me in the Student Directory. It is my understanding that the directory will be distributed to students of color to help us find tutors, form new friendships, and network with each other. It also may be distributed to staffs who work in student services to enable them to better serve ALANA students.

Date _____

Student Signature _____

21. (Fill in below only if you don't want all items included in this directory.)
It's okay to include me in the Student Directory, but please leave out items(s) number(ed): _____.

Thank you for completing this survey. Your response will assist us in bringing better services to students on campus. Please return this survey to: (Put return address here)

Organize the Directory for Maximum use

Give some thought on how you plan to organize your directory. The goal should be to make the directory user-friendly so that students will use it throughout the year. Here's an example of a typical directory entry.

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Name: John M. Doe

Home Address	**Campus Address**
1413 N. 3rd Street	400 Main Street
Milwaukee, WI 53211	Lakeland, WI
(414) 222-2222	(608) 444-4444
Photo: Optional	email:jd@yourcoll.com

Sex: Male

Year: Sophomore

Ethnicity: African American

Major: Computer Science
- Has newsletter and media experience
- Is familiar with Office Suite and Social Media
- Is interested in leadership training, student government, working with computers, and making new friends.
- Likes concerts, horror movies, and rap music.
- Would like to have tutoring in Biology and foreign language.
- Is able to provide tutoring in Math 40 and Computer Sci. 101.

General Comments: I have a car and drive home at least once monthly so if you live in Milwaukee and need a ride let me know.

I'm also a web designer so if you need a site put up or help with your Facebook page I'm your guy!

You can stop with this very basic directory or you can add additional information to make the directory an even greater resource. For example you could include on campus and community resources. In the campus selection, you could list the names of student organizations, centers and institutes, departments, and support services of interest. In the community resource section you may choose to list a range of community resources such as churches, restaurants, supermarkets, hairstylists, museums, dance studios, gyms, and cafes.

Setting Ground Rules for Using the Directory

If you choose to print copies we recommend that you sponsor a "GET ACQUAINTED" event and invite everyone listed in the directory to this event. After passing out the directory, walk students through the table of contents. Explain to them the purpose of the directory.

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Suggest ways they can use the directory (e.g., find tutors, study partners, etc.). Tell them not to misuse the directory or infringe upon someone's expertise if that person is not interested in their solicitations. Encourage a dialogue about the directory. This dialogue is helpful in providing parameters on how students feel it should be used. The dialogue tends to get students excited about the possibilities. It also makes them aware of the skills they and their peers possess, and this usually has a positive impact because it stresses self-help, which can be empowering.

Even if you only distribute the directory online I would encourage you to still sponsor a Get Acquainted event. The parameters for using the directory may be posted online or in an electronic document as well.

How to make the Directory even better-Evaluate it annually

In order to assess whether the directory is being utilized as intended and to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the students, an evaluation is essential. It allows students to know that their voices and opinions are not only valued but needed. Below you will find a tested method to get the feedback needed to improve the directory. Please feel free to adjust the questions to meet your needs. You may wish to omit certain information if you are using an online survey.

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Evaluation of ALANA Student Directory

EVALUATION OF ALANA STUDENT DIRECTORY

Please answer all items on this questionnaire. We are interested in your perceptions of the effectiveness of the ALANA Student Directory you were listed in this academic year. Your evaluation will help us in rendering better service to future participants. There are no right or wrong answers. You will not be identified in any way. Please do not include your name on this evaluation. When you have finished, return the evaluation in the enclosed addressed envelope.

1. Sex: _____ Female _____ Male

2. Year in School

____FR____SO____JR____SR____Other_____

3. Ethnic Group

____Asian
____White
____Black
____Hispanic
____Native American
____Other_____

4. Do you feel there is a positive or negative feeling associated with being listed in the Directory?

____Positive   ____Negative   ____Both

Describe the feeling_____

_____

_____

5. Do you think the directory should be continued?

____Yes   ____No   ____Not sure

Explain_____

_____

_____

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6. How did you use the directory (check all that apply)

____ To find a tutor   ____ To obtain dates

____ To meet new friends   ____ To network

____ Other_____

7. Did your listing in the directory cause you to experience any of the things described below?

	Yes	No
a. New friendships	____	____
b. Determination to graduate	____	____
c. New study partners	____	____
d. More confident about myself	____	____
e. Feelings of belonging on campus	____	____
f. More opportunities on campus	____	____
g. Increased motivation to study	____	____
h. More peers contacting you	____	____
i. More contact by staff and faculty	____	____
j. More tutoring opportunities	____	____
k. Invitations to more social activities	____	____

l. Other_____
_____

8. How would you describe your overall reaction to the directory? Circle one.

a. Extremely effective
b. Very effective
c. Effective
d. Not effective
e. Extremely ineffective

Explain_____

9. How often did you make use of the directory? Circle one.

a. Daily
b. Weekly
c. Twice a week
d. Very Seldom
e. Monthly
f. Never

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10. How can the directory be improved?

_____

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Thank you for completing this evaluation. Please place this evaluation in the enclosed envelope and drop it in the mail.

Conclusion

Student Directories are both functional and symbolic for ALANA students. They may serve as a symbol of solidarity and function as a tool of connection. With a student directory lies the potential for students to own their education through organizing. Students may have their intellectual, cultural, and social needs met merely by having access to some basic information about each other.

Although ALANA students are often a minority on college campuses, having information consolidated through a directory allows students to fight alienation with knowledge. When students know there are others like them and have a way to reach them, there is a greater chance that they will participate in university life and feel more invested in their school. Ultimately, a student directory creates a very productive sense of visibility that can only enhance the college experience and improve retention rates.