

Strategic Outlook

2015 – 2020

Fifteen years ago the very first students graduated from University College Utrecht. This year, more than 3000 graduates will have joined our alumni network. This is a memorable milestone for the UCU community. Now is the right time to reflect on what it means to be an alumnus or alumna from University College Utrecht, in theory and practice. We should analyze the current practice on alumni relations, but also seize the opportunity to imagine what we would want alumni affairs to look like in five years' time.

Reflecting on the past year, the UCAA identifies a growing importance of alumni within the UCU community. College Hall has made the important step to appoint a UCU Alumni Officer to develop a framework for institutional alumni relations management. But there's more: the student bodies are also increasingly reaching out to alumni. The UCSA is preparing its own *TedX* event which will draw on our own alumni as model examples. Likewise, ASC organized the *Life after the Bubble* event to prepare current students for both the exciting prospects *and* realistic challenges that lie ahead after graduation. These examples show the multitude of roles for alumni:

- As prolonged members of the UCU community, young alumni may need our help as they enter the job market
- But later, as knowledge-bearers they can help prepare current students for life after graduation
- And eventually as the pillars that can help sustain our community, through financial and other means

Purpose and outline

This document provides the Strategic Outlook of the UCAA for 2015-2020. We see a renewed interest in alumni both from College Hall and the student community. In this document we conceptualize a **growing ecosystem** of different parties that engage with a **changing alumni population**. The UCAA seizes these developments as an opportunity to focus on its **core mission**: to build a strong and active network of alumni that engages in a multitude of relations, both within and outside that network. In order to achieve this, we plan to continue our effort to **shape and foster the UCU alumni identity**.

This Strategic Outlook presents our plans to realize our core mission in the next five years. The structure is as follows. Firstly, the context of the changing characteristics of our alumni population is explained. Secondly, our ecosystem approach to alumni interaction is introduced. Thirdly, we review the operations of the UCAA in the past years. Fourthly, we introduce our long-term goals for the next five years. Finally, we offer an overview of the concrete actions we plan to undertake in the next six months.

This document has been prepared and revised in close collaboration with the UCU Management Team, Alumni Office, Career Development Office, Student Life Office and further shaped through our dialogue with the University College Student Association and Academic Student Council. We thank all these parties for their shared thoughts.

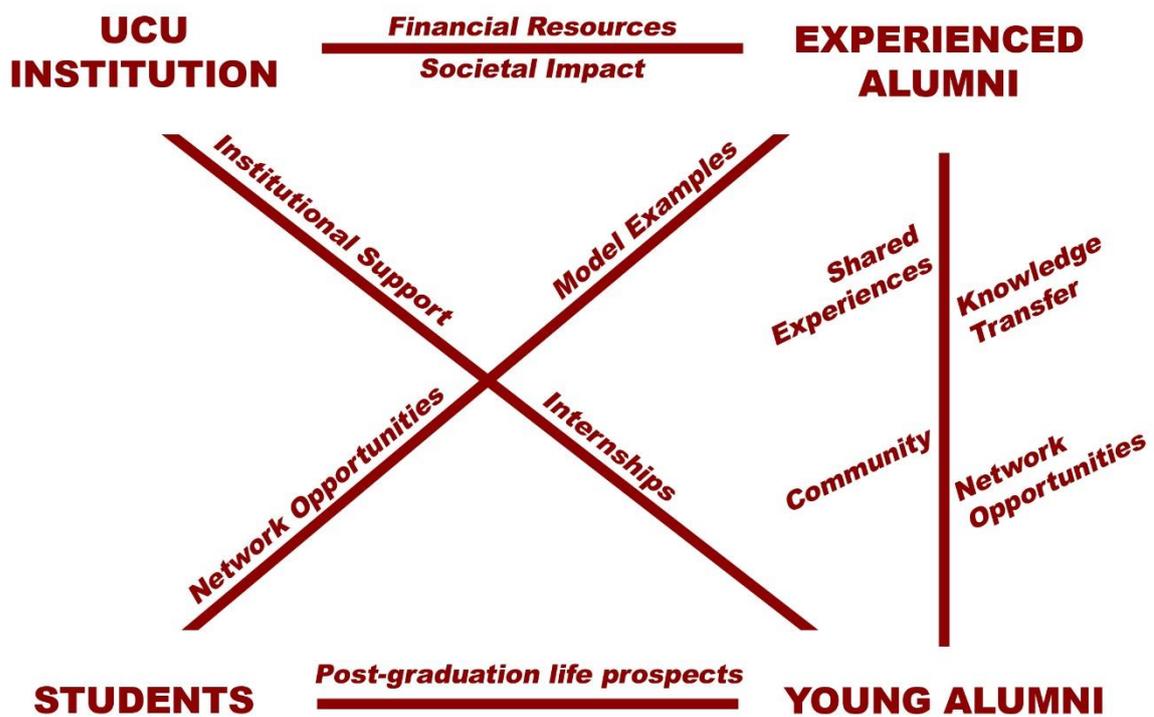
Context: changing alumni population

The number of alumni we have is not only growing, but their demographic composition is also shifting. We estimate that our average alumni are currently in their **late 20s**, but this average age will keep shifting upwards for decades to come (assuming the yearly influx of alumni remains constant). This means that in five years' time, the bulk of our alumni will be in their **early 30s** and well on their way in their career paths. As the very composition of our alumni body grows older, this unlocks a whole new range of possible interactions.

We believe we can no longer refer to just 'the alumni'. The UCAA envisions two archetypes of alumni in its five year outlook: **young alumni** (up to age 30) and **experienced alumni** (older than age 30).

The first group concerns relatively recent graduates, who are either in the process of obtaining a master's degree or PhD or have made a start in their careers. They are the most likely group to be interested in continued institutional support. The second group is already established in their career paths, and no longer in need of support. Rather, they can be persuaded to give back knowledge and financial support to young alumni, students and the institution.

A selection of the possible connections and their purposes is illustrated below.



Ecosystem approach to the alumni population

We have to see our rapidly growing and diversifying (in terms of societal positions) alumni population as a **major asset** for a wide range of parties within the UCU community. The UCAA believes that we need to create an **open and communicative ecosystem** in which all these *complementary parties* can draw on the alumni pool with as little overlap and conflict as possible.

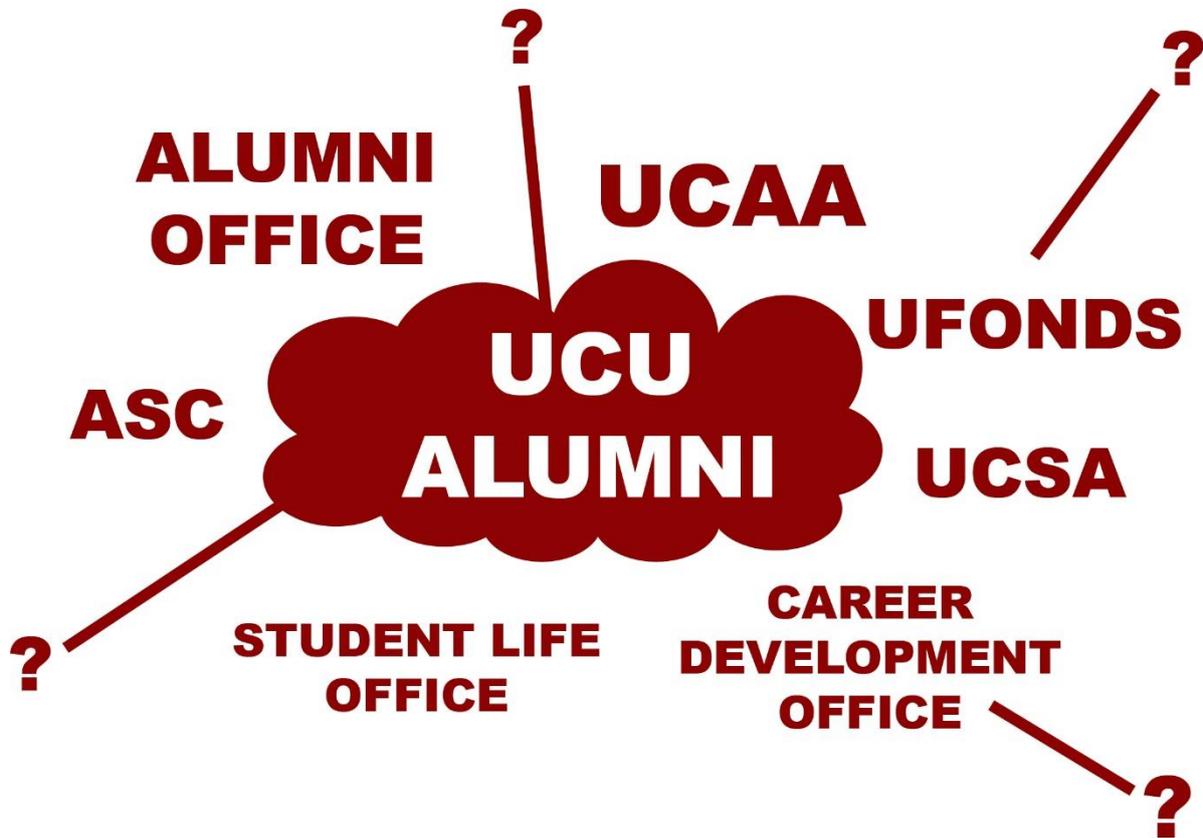


Illustration of the UCU alumni ecosystem with associated parties

EXAMPLE 1: Company Visits for students & recent alumni

The Student Life Officer has developed an innovative plan to better connect UCU students to the job market, by organizing 'company days' where students visit an organization or firm for a day (part) to familiarize with the reality of the labor market, and get acquainted with the requirements that employers may hold towards potential employees. In this case, we imagine a strong role for alumni in this plan as well:

- To offer as a service the opportunity to **young alumni** to join on these visits as they try to land on the job market
- Draw on the **experienced alumni network** to efficiently find companies and organizations willing to host such visits

In this example, we imagine that the Student Life Officer is *part of* the alumni ecosystem, and collaborates with the Alumni Officer and UCAA to connect to alumni, rather than outsource the 'alumni task' to them.

EXAMPLE 2: Corporate Relations

Currently corporate relations at UCU are limited in scope and scale, and there is no to limited communication between the different on-campus parties involved. We do not think that a company should have to maintain separate relations with a multitude of UCU-affiliated bodies (such as the UCSA, UCAA, and College Hall) – it is confusing and inefficient. We imagine much stronger collaboration in this, to create a single point of contact to the outside world. In the collaborating ecosystem that we propose, alumni can both benefit and contribute to the UCU community. For example:

- The UCAA can help find **influential alumni in key positions** that can help connect the UCSA Acquisition Committee to new (profitable) partners
- The organized events, such as recruitment days, can also be opened towards **young alumni looking for a job market entry**.

This collaborative ecosystem is modular and two-directional: if a particular party (say, UCU College Hall) wants to engage with a certain type of company for a specific project they can draw on connections already made by other parties in the UCU ecosystem, but it also means that in return they will feed any useful information or contacts back into that same system. Ecosystem parties can connect and join ad-hoc, per case or project.

In order to bring these ambitions into practice, the UCAA will take a leading role in facilitating a Corporate Relations Dialogue this Spring between all parties involved, as a bottom-up initiative to match our mutual interests and long-term goals.

UCAAA operations in review

The UCAA has conducted an internal review in the Spring 2014 period. Our overall functioning has been assessed in the Annual Report (September 2014). A number of key operational improvements (in progress) are summarized below.

Internal communication

We have improved communication within the board by introducing structured trajectories for projects and events, with a clear delineation of tasks and responsibilities. Our bi-weekly board meetings are still at the center, but agenda points are now prepared via email and followed-up afterwards through our task management software. We have created a board transition procedure to ensure board continuity as new board members join. We are still evaluating how we can improve personal development opportunities within the UCAA.

Financing

The previous treasurer (Babak) has greatly improved the financial transparency of the UCAA. The installation of a bi-yearly audit system has been completed and the first audit has been conducted in January 2015. We are now working on a cultivation plan for our donor community, and we want to diversify our income flows in the near future.

External communication

We have increased our collaboration with the Ufonds in the areas of database management and event organization. They are a valuable partner for our Association. We have also improved visibility in College Hall, but we also see opportunities and the necessity to improve this further, for example by introducing regular meetings. This also holds for our contacts towards the student bodies (UCSA & ASC) and by extent the student communities. Following our ecosystem approach, this will be a continued effort.

Long-term goals for the next five years

The growing interest in the alumni population opens up a range of new possibilities. The emergence of an ecosystem of different parties that interact with alumni can lead to new partnerships, events and opportunities. It gives us, as the UCAA, the opportunity to focus on our core mission: to build a strong and active network of engaged alumni.

At the same time, we also see an important challenge ahead. We believe that this ecosystem of alumni relations can only thrive if there is such a thing as “a UCU alumnus/alumna” – in other words, if there is **a UCU alumni identity**. A large pool of alumni contacts (be it through email or LinkedIn) does not make for a true alumni community. If people do not identify themselves proudly as alumni from University College Utrecht, **they are less likely to:**

- Reach out to UCU for assistance and guidance in the early years after graduation
- Engage in institutional relations and give back (financially or otherwise) at a later stage
- Connect to current students, exchange knowledge and offer networking opportunities

Accordingly, the **key objective of the UCAA from 2015 to 2020 is to create, build and solidify the “UCU Alumni” brand. The aim of doing so is two-fold:**

- To create the most favorable conditions for all parties in the ecosystem to successfully engage with alumni (be it in the form of College Hall generating institutional ties; or one of the student bodies reaching out to alumni for an event)
- To give meaning to ‘being a UCU alumnus or alumna’; to create a universal sense of community to an incredibly heterogeneous group

In order to attain this objective, we have identified the following **goals** that we hope to achieve in the coming years:

1. Map and measure our alumni

The alumni database is currently incomplete, even to the basic measure that the UFonds is missing large numbers of email-addresses and postal addresses. We want to make an inventory of what contact information is missing, and start recovering that. We also believe it is important to more frequently and systematically start mapping alumni through surveys, in collaboration with College Hall, to have a measure of the population we are working for: who are they, where do they live, in what sectors do they work, etc.

2. Co-organize the UCU alumni ecosystem

An ecosystem cannot be build or maintained by a single party, but requires participation from all parties. We want to help in setting up a communication platform with periodic meetings (e.g. yearly, bi-semester) to discuss overall efforts made, but also think that links between individual parties should be short. Collaboration should be fast, efficient and transparent.

3. Redevelop our website and integrate with Facebook

One of the central elements of a strong alumni identity is by having some common denominator. We want to create a digital space for all alumni to share things – ranging from internship, job and networking opportunities, to opinionated articles and discussions to life stories. The existing Post Magazine (hardcopy) will continue to exist but will be digitally integrated into this new platform as well.

4. **Organize existing and new events in Utrecht and abroad:**

Organizing activities is at the heart of the UCAA. We already have a number of activities that have become traditions for both the alumni and UCU community at large, such as the pub quiz, summer commencement BBQ and New Year's drinks. We want to further improve these events as we go, but we also want to create new events in collaboration with our ecosystem partners. In addition to social activities, we want to start organizing network-oriented events to connect both young and experienced alumni. Additionally, we want to expand our international activities with our Regional Representatives system. To facilitate this we will start exploring a number of outlets, including opportunities for sponsoring.

Action Plan Spring 2015

Words never leave paper, which is why we have a concrete plan of action for the first half of 2015. They cover different projects at different stages of planning, but the aim is to realize the bulk of these by the end of Summer 2015. The progress will be finally reported in the Annual Report scheduled for September 2015.

1. **Recover and update the alumni database (February – April)**

As mentioned in our goals, we need to get a better picture of who the UCU alumni are. To this end, we believe that the combined forces of the Ufonds, UCU Alumni Office and UCAA can help in restoring contact details to many alumni that have been lost over the years. Combining and comparing records and databases, and reaching out to alumni we have lost track off, are vital to this effort.

2. **Help prepare UCU's upcoming Alumni Survey (May - August)**

After recovering the alumni database, we want to collaborate with the Alumni Officer and Communications Officer in designing a wide survey for all alumni, to see what they are doing, where they are living and working, to which extent they feel an 'alumni' of UCU and to identify ways in which they would like to (re)connect both to UCU (the institution) as well as to their fellow alumni (the community).

3. **Develop a media strategy (February-March)**

Our new PR & Social Media coordinator will take the lead in devising a substantive media strategy, in line with our overall objective to create the 'UCU alumni identity', which will incorporate social media, our digital and hard-copy magazine (Post) and other new opportunities.

4. **Create network-oriented events in cooperation with ecosystem partners**

In addition to efforts made in the past (e.g. ASC's Life After The Bubble event) and forthcoming Spring 2015 events (UCU Career Conference, UCSA TedX event, our annual Pubquiz and Commencement BBQ) we want to work on Utrecht-based events that focus on networking and career opportunities, linking both young and experienced alumni. For this, we hope to cooperate with other parties in the alumni ecosystem such as the UCSA (Acquisition Committee).

5. **Create support for more international activities**

As a board we are limited to the Utrecht area, but we want to create more UCAA outlets abroad in addition to current bi-yearly regional meet-ups. In order to do this, however, we will need more financing and we have developed two parallel trajectories to increase income flows: we are cultivating our donor relations, and we are opening up opportunities for sponsorship financing.