



Beyond the Diploma

Formalizing a Community for Young Scholars Alumni



Background

The Young Scholars Liberty Partnerships Program is an organization created by Utica College of Syracuse University and the Utica City School District to increase local high school graduation and college enrollment rates. In an annual selective process, a cohort of rising-seventh grade students are placed into a comprehensive program promoting academic excellence and career readiness until they graduate high school. Young Scholars achieves its mission by providing academic tutoring and review sessions, facilitating mentorships, requiring community service, arranging field trips and college visits, holding support groups, and running various summer school sessions for both their middle and high school students.

Purpose

Young Scholars' programming has been incredibly effective when it comes to increasing and maintaining strong high school graduation rates. Unfortunately, earning a high school diploma does not alone solve the larger issue of generational socio-economic difficulties. To better address this persisting problem, Young Scholars has decided to tap into its underutilized alumni community.

Alumni, bringing a breadth of career expertise, can become role models to current students and younger alumni as they navigate career decisions and post-secondary education challenges. To assist alumni themselves, the creation of formal alumni networks can increase college enrollment and graduation rates as well as provide networking opportunities.

Recently, Young Scholars created the Graduate Leadership Development Program, a 10-month course that builds professional skills. However, disparate alumni age 18 through 40 remain. As such, steps were taken this summer to formally expand and structure alumni connections to help past and present Young Scholars find long-term professional support.

Engagement Initiatives

Increased individual alumni engagement with the Young Scholars family by:

- Designing a Google Form to gather alumni contact information to ultimately create an official Young Scholars alumni networking platform and gauge levels of individual interest in becoming involved with the alumni community
- Personally connecting with alumni via email, text, and private social media messaging to share information about the alumni survey and upcoming events
- Incentivizing alumni involvement with various programming and awareness initiatives by organizing a gift basket raffle
- Hosting biweekly virtual panels of alumni on a spread of professional development topics to provide face-to-face mentoring and networking opportunities while easing concerns surrounding different aspects of career advancement
- Creating a Young Scholars YouTube channel for posting recordings of virtual alumni events to make the impacts of such initiatives more accessible

Awareness Initiatives

Raised awareness about the growing Young Scholars alumni community by:

- Formally naming the community the Young Scholars Alumni Society (YSAS)



- Personally connecting with alumni via email, text, and private social media messaging to share information about the alumni survey and upcoming events
- Increasing social media presence targeted specifically towards alumni via flyers on the Young Scholars Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and alumni Facebook group
- Posting social media spotlights of different alumni to garner attention for related alumni events, utilize nostalgia, and create specific role models for Young Scholars students and younger alumni

Conclusion

A combination of hosting events and utilizing multiple forms of communication has begun to connect alumni to Young Scholars long past their high school graduation. This connection, in turn, has created an unofficial alumni volunteer base; the expertise offered by the formalized alumni community has allowed Young Scholars to develop new forms of programming targeted towards an older demographic of Young Scholars. In the future, continued efforts towards alumni engagement will hopefully build life-long, self-sustainable networks of support for Young Scholars alumni, old and new.

