



Lisa Bartholme, Assistant Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving

Project Title: Pandemic Implications to the Student to Alumni Transition Program

Purpose of Grant Project

The purpose of this grant project is to leverage changes we made to our student-to-alumni transition programming brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Alumni Relations and Annual Giving Office executes a full program of communications and activities to support and grow affinity with students as they graduate for May and December Commencement at UCCS. Our program, developed about five years ago, includes a series of e-communications, class gift fundraising, a Grad Bash celebration, legacy cord program and traditions challenge. Due to the pandemic, we elevated and increased our e-communications strategy and pivoted to a swag-filled Celebration Box mailing project to replace the in-person events and connection points we were unable to have. For May 2020, December 2020 and May 2021 Commencements, we have sent more than 2,500 customized mailings to graduating students filled with congratulatory messaging from the alumni association and college leadership, t-shirts, qualifying class gift and legacy cords and other swag. In the registration process for the Celebration Boxes, we also collected "parting thoughts" from graduating students, enabling us to provide a friendly area for feedback and insights into students' challenges and triumphs. NEAT grant funding will help fund research and analysis on the Celebration Box mailing project and development of new parts student-to-alumni transition programming based on our findings. Ideally, we would like to craft a meaningful connection point with these grads that had a mostly virtual experience.

Scope of Grant Project

We would like to develop and execute a project that will enable us to leverage the positive aspects of our pandemic pivot as it relates to our student-to-alumni transition program. This is essential as we build affinity and engagement with students who graduated in 2020 and 2021. Because we pivoted our programming so significantly and quickly, grant funding will enable us to assess what worked and leverage those findings to evolve our program to reach those recent alumni as well as incorporate new elements of our program that we developed during the pandemic. We will conduct a multi-channel effort to gather their updated contact information, survey those alumni, analyze their feedback along with their Celebration Box comments and develop additional outreach strategies for those alumni as it relates to communication, volunteer opportunities, class gift renewal and solicitation and overall engagement. Constituency groups will be the classes of 2020 and 2021 as well as future graduating students, as we modify our programming for future classes.

Process, Timeline and Methodology of Grant Project

The project consisted of hiring a data experienced intern; reviewing currently held and new data; crafting and executing a survey; reviewing pivots made during the pandemic; e-communications and class gift analysis; updated contact analysis; and looking for opportunities to incorporate findings 'in the moment' and/or in future semesters.

Timeline:

August 2021

- Hired a student intern to focus on data analysis and survey creation

September – October 2021

- Analysis of previous held data – Celebration Box comments
- E-Comm open and click comparison – pre and during pandemic grads

November 2021

- Survey strategy and creation in Qualtrics
- Invitation to three semesters of pandemic grads to in-person grad celebration

January & February

- Finalize survey creation
- Survey launch and marketing: email series and paid social advertising

March 2022

- Survey results analysis
- Thank you mailing to survey respondents

April 2022

- Meeting with campus partners
- Presenting to internal teams
- Invitation to pandemic grads to walk in May in-person Commencement

May 2022

- NEAT Grant Final Report submission

Throughout the process we were incorporating what we learn 'in the moment': License Plate Frame mailing to May 2021 grads; pandemic grad invites to December in-person Grad Bash party; continue to invite our grads who had a virtual Commencement to upcoming ceremonies.

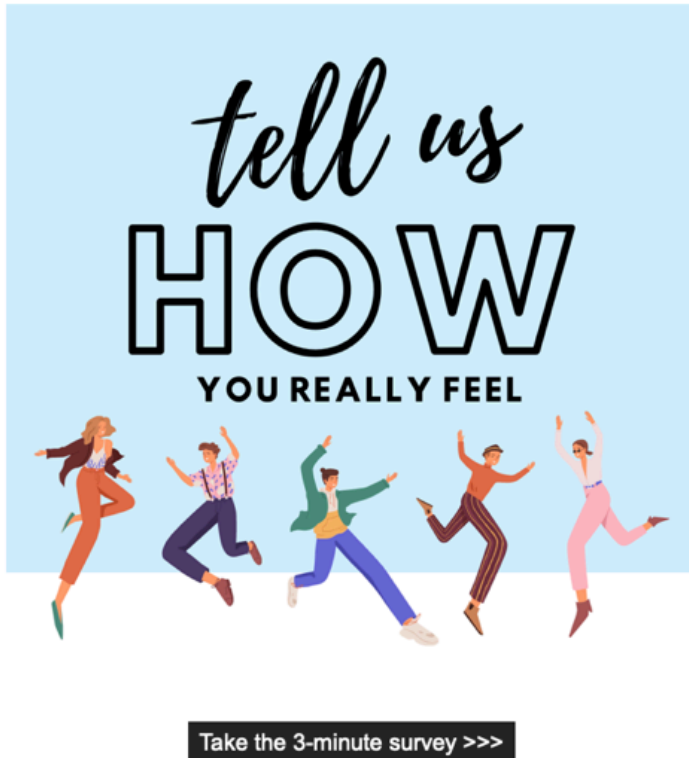
Survey Instrument and Methodology

For the survey aspect of our work we utilized Qualtrics. Qualtrics is also where the responses from the surveys will be stored with the ability to analyze and interpret the data. The data obtained from the survey of the three semesters of pandemic grads will be used to do a gap analysis of our student to alumni plan and grow future alumni office programming.

file:///Users/lbarthol/Desktop/NEAT%20Grant/Alumni_Survey_Report.html

Samples of Marketing Components

Survey Email



**Take this quick survey by March 1 and receive a free
UCCS webcam cover!**

The UCCS Alumni Office is very interested in thoughts and perspectives from you – **a UCCS student who graduated during the three semesters of virtual learning and Commencement.**

This short 5-question survey takes less than 3 minutes (yep! really.) and will help us understand your experience and craft future connections to UCCS and your fellow alumni.

Kindly participate in the survey by March 1, and as a thank you, [download your free UCCS virtual background](#) AND watch your mailbox - all who complete the survey will receive a UCCS webcam cover!

Thank you!

UCCS Alumni Team

University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) NEAT Grant Final Report 2021-2022

Paid Social to encourage survey participation



141 unique clicks



29 unique clicks

Insert used in survey Thank You mailing



University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) NEAT Grant Final Report 2021-2022

Pandemic custom Celebration Boxes

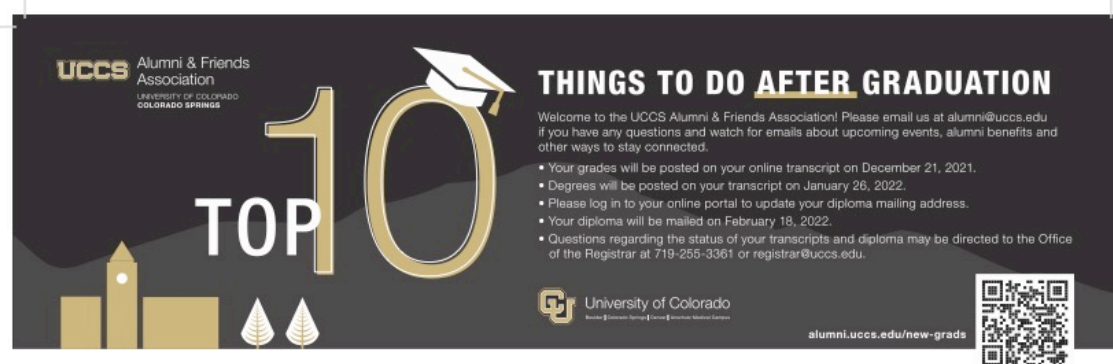


Post-pandemic pivot to graduation welcome mailing and license plate frame gift



University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) NEAT Grant Final Report 2021-2022

Repacking of alumni benefits to graduating students



Grant Project Budget

Total amount of Grant: \$5000

UCCS contribution: \$1011.34

Expenses:

• \$1239.00	Student Worker
• \$2305.69	Postage for New Grad Welcome mailing
• \$ 150.00	Survey participation drawing (3 - \$50 Amazon gift cards)
• \$ 59.00	Printing of mailing insert
• \$ 280.00	Top 10 After flyer printing
• \$ 232.42	Social Boosting for survey
• \$1688.00	Grad Bash celebration
• \$ 57.23	Postage to send TY mailing
\$6011.34	Total

Brief Summary of Findings:

Pandemic Pivot Review – what to keep and what to sunset

- Communication plan – kept most of the edits we made during the pandemic
- Created a new welcome mailing to replace the pandemic driven Celebration Box.
- We were able to keep and expand the new campus-wide collaborations with our military office and each college dean.
- Changed affinity-based Class Gift program to student emergency funds during the three pandemic semesters, now have switched back to affinity-based giving.
- Kept the repackaged our offices 'offerings' into a more digestible Top 10 Before (sent postal mail) and After (inserted into their diploma covers) graduation list
- Returned to our in-person events: Graduation Fair, Finals Survival Coffee, and Grad Bash.

Celebration Box Comment Summary

- 90+ percent of the graduate provided updates (non-UCCS) email addresses
- 99% of graduates had a positive or neutral sentiment about their experience and this stayed consistent over the three semesters
- 98% appreciated the 5-points of customization that the boxes offered
- All campus partners on this project found value in the collaboration with the Alumni Office

Survey Summary

- Got 159 response out of XXX sent
- Most helpful communications: Celebration Boxes, Senior Checklist, Commencement Registration, Class Gift
- Least helpful communications: KUDO Board, Career Webinars
- What they most want from the UCCS Alumni Office: Services and Benefits: Career Support, Discounts, Events and Volunteering opportunities
- Overall sentiment expressed was equally split between positive and sadness

Class Gift Review

- The pandemic had mix results on the class gift effort. We found that slightly fewer students donated, but gave a higher average gift resulting in record breaking giving for those semesters.

Ecomm analysis

- Our pre-pandemic Student to Alumni transition email series usually has an open rate of 45-63% and a very high click thru rate.
- After analyzing the open/click rate for the three semesters of pandemic grads we found no noticeable difference in those statistic.

Impact of Future Alumni Programming

A little looking back to fine tune what we did during the pandemic and looking forward on how to sharpen out benefits to alumni has been two of the most valuable things during this process.

We hope also that the meaningful connection point with these grads that had a mostly virtual experience was noticed and will be a good starting point to a life-long connection to UCCS.

The survey and other data that was evaluated re-affirmed our office's mission to foster and grow meaningful connection and engagement points with all UCCS alumni. The survey results gave us renewed focus on where we should continue our efforts.

Conclusion

Being awarded this NEAT grant enabled our office to engage in outreach, data collection and analysis that we typically do not have the resources and time to do. With the many immediate and substantial changes that the pandemic required, it was essential for our office to understand how those changes affected UCCS students who graduated in 2020 and May 2021, including their perception of their alma mater. We also needed to learn and understand which of the changes we made we should continue, and which we can drop now that our operations have mostly returned to normal. We did not want to drop any changes made during the pandemic that might help us in our future work.

Thanks to this grant, we were able to conduct outreach to our 2020 and May 2021 grads in a meaningful way, by inviting them to a graduation celebration that they missed, and by seeking their survey input and offering a prize drawing. This contact alone helps us improve affinity with our recent graduates. Our data analysis showed the perception that this population of alumni have of UCCS, and what benefits, events and other things matter most to them. We have begun to implement some their feedback into our programming, and are excited that this grant enabled us to make crucial contact with this group.