

The Final Countdown

A guide to welcoming your final year students into your alumni community

Class of 2021



The countdown is on...

Your final years are fast approaching their final terms at university. Whether you're saying goodbye virtually or in person, here's how to **welcome them into your alumni community** and get them signed up to your online platform in the next 6 months!

The last year has demonstrated just how important connecting online can be for wellbeing, education and opportunities. An online alumni platform gives you a secure, private portal to engage your alumni, with a **built-in CRM and database**. Alumni can join clubs, sign up to events and connect with fellow alumni to reminisce or network. Using an all-in-one system to collect alumni details means that unlike social media, **you own the data** and can collect the most relevant information. With a private portal, you avoid social media algorithms that are impossible to predict, while giving your alumni a **space to connect with each other** and stay up-to-date with your university.

This guide contains lots of tips to get your final year students signed up - from getting students to register on their phones during their graduation, to sharing words of wisdom from your older alumni - so **start today** to begin a lifelong connection with your class of 2021.

How to use this resource

Whether your senior year students' final terms are spent virtually or in person, these last months are a brilliant opportunity to engage your class of 2021 before they leave. Each month there is a new tactic to focus on, to help sign up your class to your platform. By encouraging your alumni to sign up ahead of their departure, you will **engage a greater number of your graduating class**.

It's helpful to start the sign up process early for your alumni platform, as this avoids a rush later in the year to persuade seniors to sign up before their university email addresses expire.

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To create a sustainable alumnae network, you need to engage the current school community before they leave the school. When students depart to college, they often stay in contact with girls at the school and advise them on their college choices. Once they start their first jobs, they know they can tap into a huge network of alumnae who will offer them mentoring and careers advice.”

Jenny Blaiklock, Director of Development, Lady Eleanor Holles, London, UK



6 months to go

Give them a reason to connect

Invite existing alumni to share their own stories of connecting through your alumni community.

Introduce your community with real life stories from your alumni. By showing them that other graduates are enjoying being a part of your university's alumni community, and are benefiting from the experience, you are proving the value of joining.



Hearing directly from alumni will get students thinking about the opportunities available to them.

You can recruit alumni to help in different ways, such as:

- Asking them to post a friendly comment on your forum to welcome the new class to the alumni community
- Asking alumni to come into university or stage a virtual event to talk through their career journey and experiences since leaving your university, school or college
- Staging an online networking event, such as a virtual coffee with 'break-out' groups
- Run a series of virtual lectures with inspirational alumni and final year students, to reflect on their time since leaving university and how far the alumni network has supported them
- Ask relevant alumni to share advice; for example, '08 graduates shared advice with the class of 2020 for trying to adapt their job hunt to a global recession



5 months to go

Reward them for joining the programme

Give a token gift to welcome students into your alumni community

Whether it's a university sweatshirt or course yearbook, incentivising your graduating class with a small gift to sign up is a gracious way to welcome them into your alumni community.

Branding the gifts with your logo helps keep their university in mind when they set off to work - particularly if they can take the item with them. Surbiton High School in the UK gives all final years a branded rubber duck and encourages alumni to send back selfie-photos on their adventures with the duck! With this in mind, longevity is key when choosing products!



Think practical, think premium, and make it personal.

Other ideas for branded merchandise:

- Bound notebook with university crest
- A tie/ cap in alumni association colours
- A commemorative coin
- Everyday items like a reusable tote bag, umbrella or laptop case
- Something quirky like a university teddy mascot, a beautiful year-group photo book or a funny alarm clock

Think digital; ways to celebrate alumni online:

- A LinkedIn badge of your alumni logo
- A branded 'frame' for profile pictures on social media
- A personal email signature banner promoting their alma mater



The [Institute of Development Studies](#), based in the UK, shares exclusive discounts and offers with their new alumni to help them continue their education. These benefits are accessed via their 'Class of 2020' leavers page on their alumni site.



[Wells Cathedral School](#), based in the UK, achieves 95% engagement with their graduates, and presents all leaving students with a personalised Life Membership Token, a lovely gesture of lifelong friendship, support and community.



4 months to go

Engage graduates via the alumni community



Invite your seniors to their end of year events through your alumni platform

When it's time for final year students to book their tickets to their eagerly awaited graduation, inviting them to book their tickets through your alumni platform will incentivise sign up rates.

Using your online community to organize and promote your events is a great way for alumni to come together, whether that's virtually for now or at reunions in the future.

Here's how you can promote your events:

- Send out invitations via email from your all-in-one system
- Ask course-group reps/ ambassadors to share the link with their peers
- Share the event link to your social media groups and from any other university websites
- Share updates on the event on as announcements on your community site

Encourage engagement with comms and consent preferences at this stage

While your 2021 graduates set up their online profiles in your alumni community, why not capture their opt-in for future communication?

If you want to fundraise from alumni in the future you might want to take this opportunity to gather consent from your graduates to send them occasional email updates about university fundraising projects.

The American Embassy School, India, has already invited new graduates to their annual alumni reunion in 2021, with their growing alumni population resulting in 450 attendees at their last alumni event!



[St John's College,](#)

University of Sydney, has set up clubs for different regions, industries and hobbies to help their alumni stay connected and attend events that are relevant to them.



3 months to go

Co-create Class of 2021 content

Collaborate with your senior years to produce content for your alumni site

Posting exclusive content behind a log-in encourages students to sign up to check it out.

User submitted content

Ask your final years to submit content to your platform, for example: a short introduction to themselves, where they'd like to be in 5 years time, and their proudest achievement from university.

Interesting content ideas:

- Experiences of different careers from older alumni
- Graduation photos
- Link to a 'Celebrating class of 2021' video
- Farewell messages from tutors
- Predictions of where they'll be in 1 or 5 or 10 years' time - which can be used as a 'hook' to re-contact the year-group in the future! These predictions can be 'fun' - e.g. most likely to be living on a remote island/ saving the planet/ running for elected office etc



Calling all creatives!

If you have students who are studying courses or are already passionate about writing, videography or photography, why not invite them to contribute to your university alumni community?

Delegating content generation

Conversely, well-connected graduates could be given responsibility for encouraging fellow students to upload pictures to a Class of 2021 gallery, or collecting quotes or anecdotes to share in community groups.



Top tip!

Ask your course president or any student ambassadors to submit their introduction, and they can share this with the rest of their year group!

The [Institute of Development Studies](#) has an alumni blog that reaches 7000 reads every month! They share articles written by alumni on topics from climate change to COVID-19 responses.



2 months to go

Establish a mentoring scheme

Set up a mentoring programme

One of the best ways to welcome your new alumni and provide an opportunity for continued engagement could be through a mentoring scheme.

You can start this once your final years officially leave, or during their final year so that alumni can give advice on first career steps and how to succeed with graduate schemes.

When asked about planned alumni engagement activities for their 2020 graduates, 65% of development professionals in our survey planned to set up a mentoring programme as a way to support and engage with their alumni.

Mentoring programme starter kit

Here's a starter kit to getting your mentoring programme off the ground:

1. Ask for volunteer mentors from your existing alumni network. A good time to get in touch could be those that have graduated in the last few years from your university, especially in notably competitive industries such as law and medicine.
2. Add new categories to your mentoring options that will appeal to your seniors, such as 'Graduate scheme advice' and 'Internships'.
3. Publish a 'Best practice guide' to explain how to make the most of the mentoring experience for mentees.
4. Introduce the mentoring programme to your final years during course lectures or in a workshop, where you can talk them through the platform and answer any questions. If possible, ask a few of your mentors or mentees to talk to students about what they got out of the experience.
5. Ask for feedback from mentees and share positive anecdotes on your alumni site to encourage further engagement.



Get your older alumni involved

Why not invite one of your older alumni to record a video message for seniors, explaining how much they have gained from maintaining alumni connections over the years?

The [Wistar Institute](#), USA, connects with curious, intellectually minded students and provides work experience to help them establish careers as biomedical research technicians.



1 month to go

Get personal & give a reason

Ensure that your graduates' details are up-to-date!

Many students will sign up with their university email address, meaning they are unavailable to be contacted after their addresses expire. Collecting their personal email address, and updated home address if they are moving, will save lots of admin time later down the line and ensure that you can keep in touch.

You can set up a quick notification to pop up whenever students log in to ask them to check and update their details. You can also use this as an opportunity to check their consent preferences, so you send them the most relevant communications.

You may also want to set a date for a **'just left meet-up'** - for example a reunion in the first Christmas after graduation, which could turn into an annual dinner hosted by the university.

Give graduates a reason to leave their personal data behind

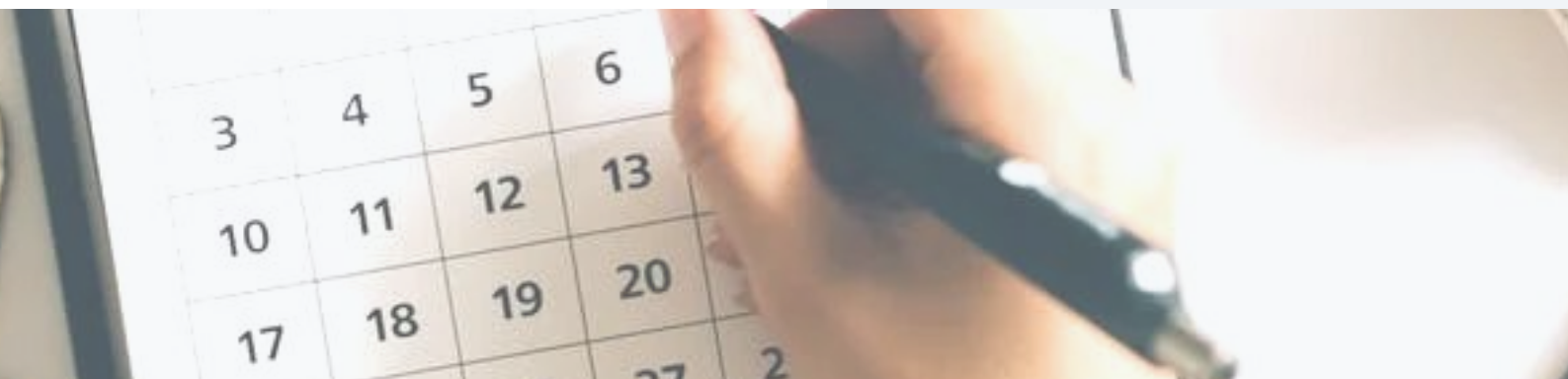
When asking students to share personal details, it's important to make it clear why the university wants to store this information, and what it will be used for.

Sharing a list of reasons that benefit them may increase the number of personal details that students are willing to share, such as -

- To keep you informed about updates to the university
- To invite you to networking or learning events in future
- To share mentoring/careers initiatives with you
- To ask you to get involved in relevant activities
- To inform you about connection requests from fellow alumni

In a 2020 ToucanTech survey, 92% of development professionals wanted to contact new alumni by email, but 83% of their school email addresses expired within a year.

Don't lose touch with alumni who would love to hear from your university!



Success!

The next steps for your class of 2021

Hopefully, the hard work of signing up a new class to your alumni network is mostly over, and you can focus on creating meaningful, sustainable engagement.

Engaging your recent graduates usually takes a different form to the rest of your alumni community; they are much less likely to be in a position to give back to their university at this point in their lives, and will mostly want to use the alumni community to hear updates about graduation and degree results.

Here are 3 things you can share with your new alumni in their first summer:

- Send them a postcard from the university, wishing them well
- Share any summer internships or graduate scheme opportunities
- Encourage new alumni to take advantage of your mentoring scheme

For further resources on engaging your alumni, check out one of our guides:

[Deepening Alumni Connections: Without Physical Events](#)

[Adapting fundraising & alumni communications during COVID-19: A practical case study](#)

[Five Engagement Examples](#)

[Encouraging Business Networking](#)

[6 reasons your alumni should join your online community](#)

[Engaging recent leavers](#)



Connect your Class of 2021 long-term using an online community website

A private portal provides a place for alumni of all ages to come together & engage with the university.

Creating an online alumni community gives your alumni the choice to join in and stay in touch with your university. Whether they want to hear the latest university news, or take advantage of job opportunities in their network, having access to a platform where alumni feel encouraged to connect is a lifelong benefit.



News

Publish articles about the school, or alumni initiatives



Events

Promote opportunities to connect, online or offline



Discussion Forum

Encourage conversation and comment



Picture Galleries

Post images old and new, and create galleries



Individual Groups

Coordinate subsets of alumni into groups or clubs



Merchandise

Use the online shop to make sales, or promote donations



Notifications

Inform community members when activity takes place



Job Board

List available opportunities at top organisations



Resources

Share helpful guidance, such as CV templates

Did you know?

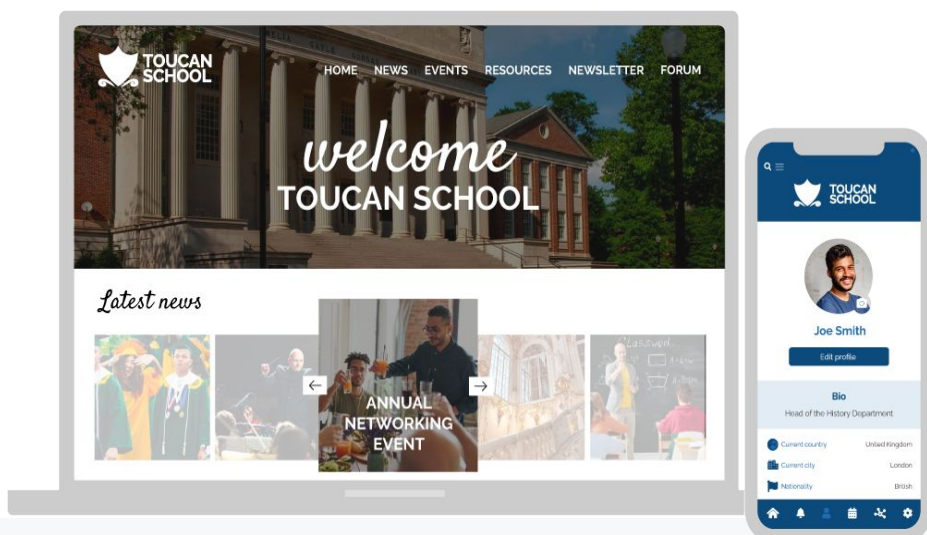
A ToucanTech alumni community is connected to a robust database and easy-to-use CRM system, meaning that all interactions are automatically logged on alumni records. A built in email engine makes contacting alumni simple.



About ToucanTech



ToucanTech is a **community software** used by schools, **higher education** and charities for marketing, membership, alumni, careers, and fundraising activities. Combining a flexible **website** and powerful **database/ CRM**, it's an easy, all-in-one system.



Database

Import, filter, update and merge record, create custom fields, forms and admin permissions



Community

Connect your members on a branded network with privacy controls and mobile app



CRM

Track activity, measure engagement, capture consents, create postal labels, sync emails



Groups

Set-up club pages where admins can manage their own members, discussions, events



Email

Design and schedule newsletters, view stats, remove bounced emails, manage unsubscribes



Fundraising

Process donations and tax relief, set up funds, reconcile payments, run reports, steward donors



Resources

Upload photos, documents, magazines - tag, categorise, share and track downloads



Careers

Run a mentoring system, post jobs, publish careers guides, promote business networking



News

Publish articles, videos, and other content - track views, tag people, share on social media



Events

Manage your events (online or in-person), invites, reminders, seating plans and ticketing



“

I couldn't do my job without it.

I log in to our ToucanTech system daily to share content, send newsletters and update database records - it's a fantastic tool for any educational institution."

Michelle Cruickshank,
Institute of Development Studies



Visit toucantech.com or email hello@toucantech.com to book a product demo

