Social Media and Reunions

The Office of Development and Alumni Relations will work with you and your class reunion committee to provide the support and tools necessary to make Reunion successful. One of the important roles that we in DAR play is to encourage and assist your class as you plan your reunions. To support these events, we have put together some informal guidance to start the classes off in their efforts, and we remain available to answer any questions we can throughout the planning process.

What is social media?
If you look it up on Wikipedia, the first thing you’ll read is that “social media has been around since humans began to talk.” It goes on to give the cave paintings of Lascaux as an example of social media. Broadly, social media is any effort to communicate in some lasting way with other people. In our digital age, we think of social media as efforts to communicate in Internet-based technologies and formats. Social media technologies take many forms. Even if we don’t all use them or are not familiar with how they work, it is very likely that we’ve all heard of them: Internet discussion forums, blogs, wikis (like the Wikipedia I mentioned), pod casts, tweeting, and picture sharing (Tumblr, Instagram).

For our purposes, we’re going to talk mainly about a few types of social media that we use most commonly: our online community and site known as Forum, Facebook, and Twitter. But you are not limited to these platforms if you find ways to use other platforms that you’re comfortable with, for example, if you want to post reunion photos to Tumblr.

Every class will be different. You should think about how your class uses the various forms of social media. For example, this year, the class of 1964 decided its class members were most comfortable primarily using a “static” web page—their class page on Forum—instead of more “dynamic” or interactive social media forms such as Facebook or Twitter. Their class page became a landing and starting point for all of their reunion information, including attendance records, letters encouraging people to register, and a book of class memories, as well as a place to list links to other Reunion resources, including the class’s Facebook page. On the other hand, you may decide that your class members are more inclined to use social media forms like your own class reunion Facebook page, or an existing page like Every Day Classnotes, or a discussion form like Grinnell Plans, or a Twitter account for your class. Whatever you decide is up to you, and we are here to help if you need our assistance.

BASIC PLANNING

Know what you want to accomplish. As with anything, it helps to have strategic objectives or goals. Obviously, with Reunion, your goals are to encourage attendance and raise funds for your class campaign. One of the best ways to reach these goals is through communications that pull on the heart strings, that stir memories about being at Grinnell and that create excitement about seeing old friends again and revisiting favorite parts of campus. This works in print material as well as social media posts, so think about how to craft that kind of message in your Facebook posts, emails, and other outreach efforts.

Plan well in advance. Consider timelines for working with our staff, developing your own social media pages, and using other ways to get the word out.
Recruit volunteers to lead the charge and take ownership of the activities. Volunteers are the backbone of any successful event, so engage them early and often in the planning process, and identify a lead-volunteer to serve as the point person on the day of the event.

Make it a team effort. Appoint a team leader to provide overall direction, but designate individuals to communicate with alumni, send email reminders, and update Facebook and other web pages. Don’t let the responsibility for planning and executing your service events rest on one person’s shoulders.

Have fun! Remember the spirit of the service you’re doing and enjoy the camaraderie of serving others alongside your classmates.

Communicate your results and say thanks. Report your accomplishments to your class body and celebrate your success!

WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

We provide a number of resources, including a directory, a class page, a reunion web site (on Forum), and online registration, as well as other official communications, such as email blasts and printed mailings.

You support the reunion effort through your own networking and social media.

- Your class page (on Forum) can be a great, fun, all-purpose landing place for all your registration material and information, and you can be as creative with the page as you like.
  - 1964 is an example of how to use the page, but what you do here is really up to you.
  - Post updates on who in your class has signed up, provide links to your class’s Facebook page, and links to any other material you want to create in support of Reunion.
  - We will support you, of course, with adding material to this page and keeping it maintained.
- The Forum directory has contact information for you classmates.
  - A more specific directory of your classmates is available on your class page.
  - When you communicate with classmates about Reunion, you might want to consider asking if they have signed up for Forum (so they can see the latest updates on the class page) and if they have updated their directory information.
- Twitter is another great way to get the word out quickly and easily. Or create a Twitter account for your class.
- Have fun creating your own Facebook page, either for your class or specifically for Reunion.
HOW TO CRAFT THE MESSAGE

Remind people that they’re part of something bigger—and that they always have been.

Emphasize the social part of reunion, returning to their alma mater, reconnecting with their school and with each other.

- Share DAR reminder updates
- Apply social pressure—“Who’s missing from this attendance list?”
- Keep a countdown—“Only 30 days left until registration closes? Have you registered yet?” “Only 10 days until Reunion Weekend. Who else is excited?”

The value in social media is conversation, and you want to create a conversational “buzz” about reunion.

Try to make your posts not only informational but also interactive or participatory.

- Use cross posting. For example, if you have pictures from last Reunion and post them to the class Facebook page, you might also want to post them to Flickr for your non-Facebook friends, or to your Forum class page, and you might want to tweet about what you’ve put on Facebook or Forum.
- Use 2-3 posts per week.
- Keep the posts short, use informal language, and have fun.
- Leverage other sources of content, such as DAR communications, old photos, other Facebook pages by other classes, etc. Photos are a big draw. They seem to get the most responses on almost any kind of Facebook page, including our own Grinnell College Alumni and Friends Facebook page.
- Use the class page and Facebook page to generate excitement, link to popular sites, attendance updates, our Reunion FAQ list and other “official” pages, reminders about the class campaign, etc.
- Committee members should share each other’s posts and tweets. Encourage other people to share your posts and retweet your tweets. This behavior keeps the posts and tweets alive, in a sense.
- Encourage people to get nostalgic—ask them to post about memories about their reunion plans and also about their class and reunion memories.
- Celebrate landmark times—“Remember 25 years ago when we did this?”
- Show photos from previous reunions.
- These are just a few suggestions for the kind of content you can create. You should feel free to brainstorm for other ideas with your classmates, and with us.
WHAT ELSE?

*Become “on the scene” reporters.*

When you attend Reunion, take pictures. But also think about providing a firsthand account of your Reunion experience by sending updates and photos to your Twitter account using a hashtag that we’ll give you for Reunion. See if you can capture events of the weekend, or get your classmates to volunteer to cover specific events. Unlike an after the fact article in the Grinnell Magazine or on Forum, the raw commentary of real alumni would provide a unique personal record of Reunion in real time for those who could not attend.

Later, we in DAR can also compile all the photos that show up in our Twitter and Facebook pages. And you can use them again in your Forum class page or your own or your class’s Facebook page.

RESOURCES

*Remember, you’re not in it alone.*

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Digital Grinnell (for old photos and other material)
http://digital.grinnell.edu/drupal/

Reunion Web Site
http://forum.grinnell.edu/node/18/

Forum Directory of Alumni Profiles
*Note: Alumni directory information is accessible only to registered Forum members.*
http://forum.grinnell.edu/community/directory

Alumni News Stories
http://forum.grinnell.edu/alumni-news

Grinnell College Alumni and Friends Facebook Fan Page
https://www.facebook.com/grinnellcollegealumni

Grinnell College Alumni Twitter Feed
https://twitter.com/AlumniGrinnell

Class Pages
*Note: Class pages are accessible only to registered Forum members.*
http://forum.grinnell.edu/community/groups/class-pages