

Giving Alumni What They Want: How magazine content “stacks up” when compared to Alumni preference

Magazine Content Research

One of the areas of concentration for the Alumni Attitude Study is how effectively universities and alumni associations communicate with their alumni through a variety of mediums. AAS benchmarks suggest that certain topics are particularly important to alumni as they form their opinion about how well the university is performing overall. We believe those institutions that effectively address these issues will increase alumni loyalty, participation and giving. With in mind, we have undertaken a preliminary Study of how much alumni magazine space is allocated to the topics and issues alumni say are important to them as they determine the current value of the degree they earned from their alma mater.

In the interest of helping institutions better connect with their alumni, we wanted to go beyond anecdotal or perceptual evidence and see how alumni magazine content “stacks up” when compared with their preferences. The topics alumni rank as important usually include things like the success of current students and faculty, as well as pertinent research that the university is currently undertaking.

In keeping with AAS principles of reliability and comparability, we designed a method for measuring alumni magazine content based on the Standard Advertising Unit (SAU) used by media buyers, advertisers, and sales professionals. We first identified the topics that alumni tended to be most interested in and then measured the space allocated to those topics by alumni magazine editors. The topics usually included the accomplishment of current students and faculty, happenings on campus, research success stories, athletic stories and alumni accomplishments. We measured each type of story in column inches and then derived the percentage of the magazine devoted to each type of story using a ‘Raw Data’ number for each magazine and multiplying the SAU value per page by the number of pages in the magazine.

Our initial research suggests that there is a tendency for universities and alumni association to focus too heavily on the alumni recognitions and accomplishments at the expense of publicizing current student and faculty endeavors and successes. AAS data consistently shows that the most important issue for alumni as they assess the current value of their degree is the caliber and success of current students and faculty. In other words, they evaluate their alma mater’s current reputation based on these issues, and several others, that are happening on campus right now!

Are magazines delivering the content that their alumni want to see?

We applied the above approach to 20 magazines produced by either alumni associations or university advancement offices. This research produced several very interesting results. We found that on average, these magazines devoted only 10 % of their content space to stories focusing on student accomplishment, the topic identified by alumni as having the greatest positive effect on equity of degree. In sharp contrast, 52 % of magazine content space was devoted to stories about notable alumni, a factor that alumni (especially recent graduates) don’t consider when evaluating their alma mater’s current performance and reflecting on the value of their degree.

Based on the findings from this initial investigation, we plan to expand the study to evaluate 50 magazines from both alumni association and university advancement offices in order to develop a more comprehensive picture of content and its relationship to alumni preference and attitude. If universities and associations can tailor the content they produce to match alumni preference they can positively effect alumni engagement and ensure that the right messages are reaching the right audience.



866-471-8600



University and Alumni Association Magazine Content Research

An Alumni Attitude Study Research Project



Participating Institutions

Baylor University
Berea College
Culver Academy
Humboldt State University
Kansas State University
Northwestern University
Rochester Institute of Technology
Southern Illinois University
Texas A&M University
Tulane University
University of Central Florida
University of Houston
University of Massachusetts - Amherst
University of Miami
University of Missouri
University of Nevada - Las Vegas
University of Oregon

AAS Benchmarks - Communication

- Nationwide data clearinghouse comprised of alumni responses focusing on key issues in alumni relations including communication.
- Benchmarks show that communication plays an integral role in how alumni rate their university.
- Publicizing student, faculty, current research and community outreach projects improve the university's standing with alumni as well as the general public.
- Value and respect for degree increases as awareness about positive happenings on campus increases.
- Publications are too often focused on 'lists' of alumni, rather than individual student, faculty, or alumni accomplishment.

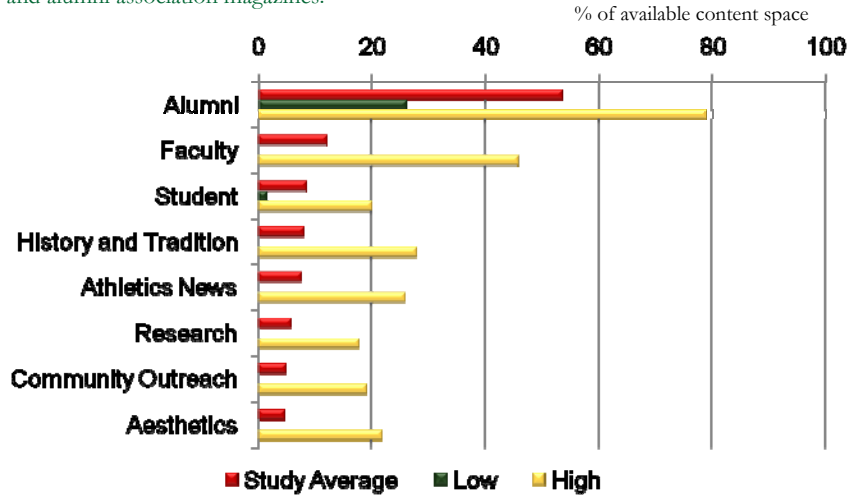
Metrics

- Measurement of space allocation is based on total column inches for each individual magazine.
- To evaluate the space allocated to particular content, we used the industry standard SAU (Standard Advertising Unit).
- {SAU = height * width / 2.1667}.
- Averages are based on percentage of column inches devoted to each content category.

PEG, Ltd and Alumni Attitude Study[®]
 Measuring Magazine Content against Alumni Preference
 January 2008

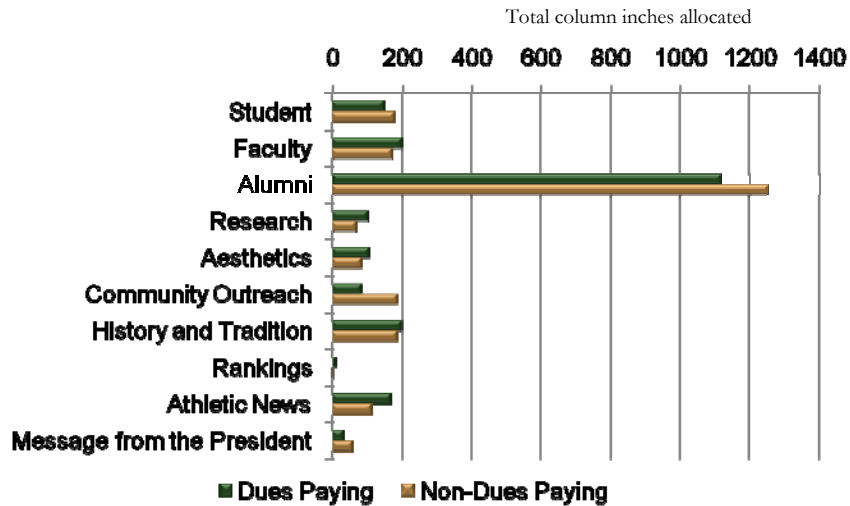
Study Averages

Preliminary results show a wide range of space allocation and content choice in university and alumni association magazines.

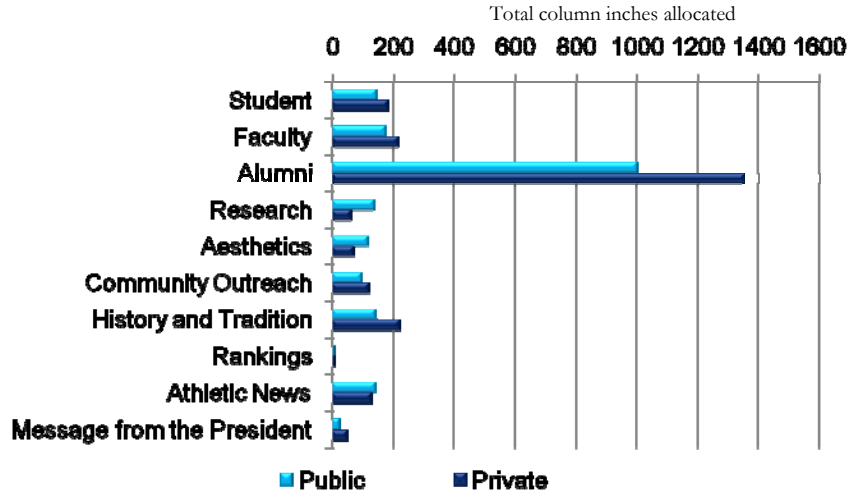


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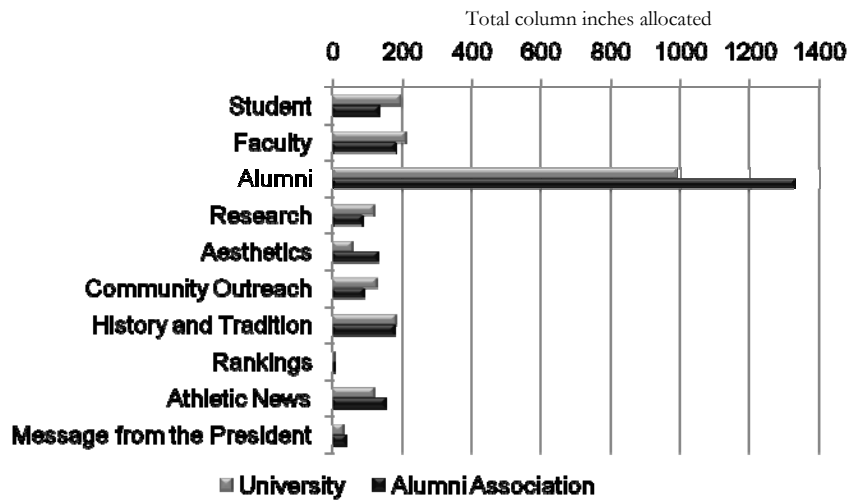
Dues vs. Non-Dues Paying Associations



Public vs. Private Institutions



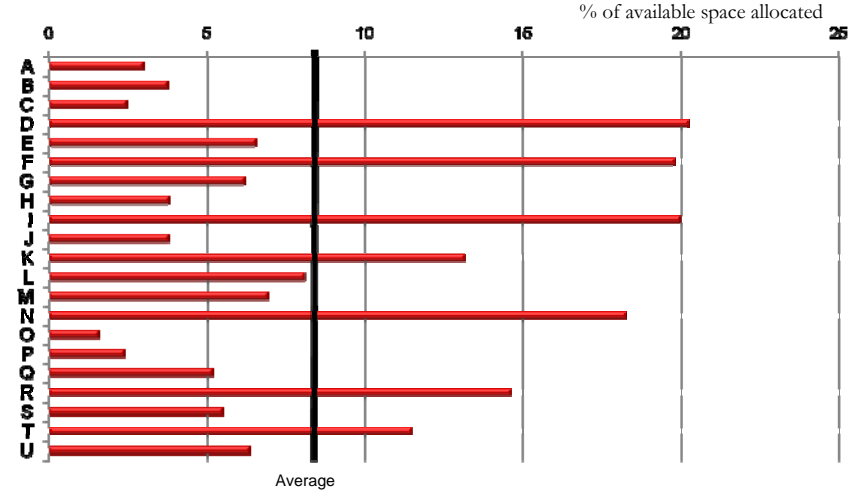
University vs. Alumni Association Publications



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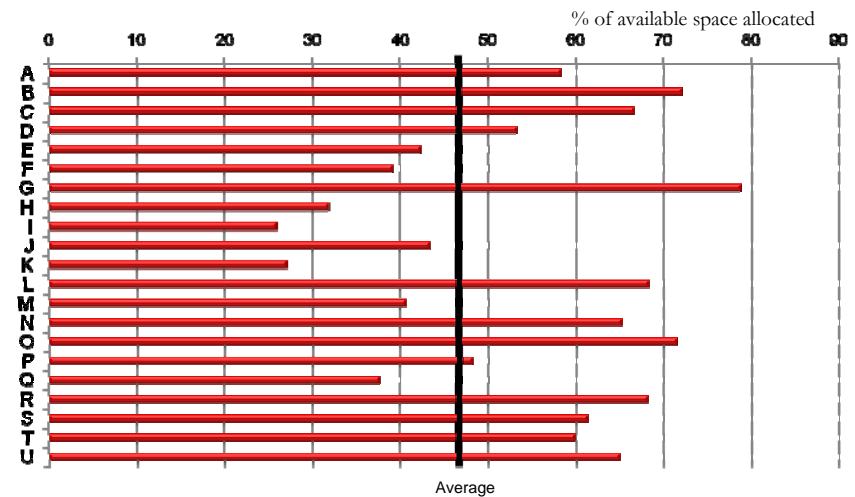
Student Activities and Accomplishments

Preliminary findings show that university and alumni association magazines vary widely in the amount of space they allocate to student activities and accomplishments.



Alumni Activities and Accomplishments

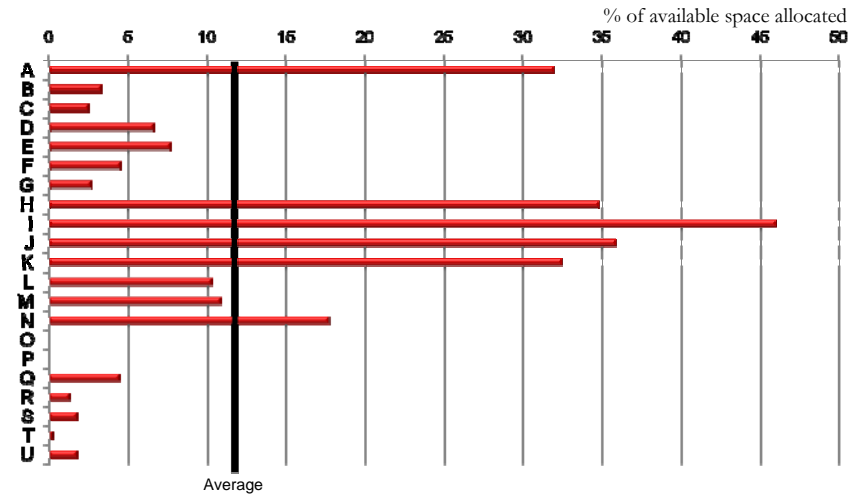
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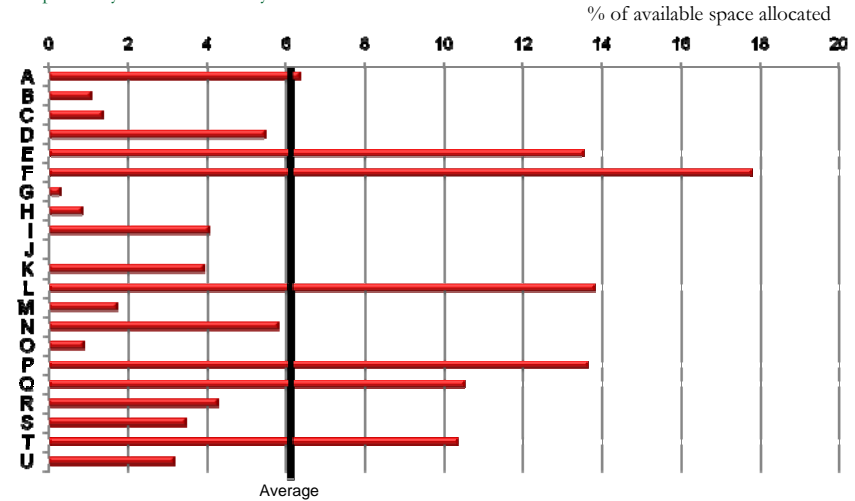
Faculty Activities and Accomplishments

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Scholarship and Research Activities

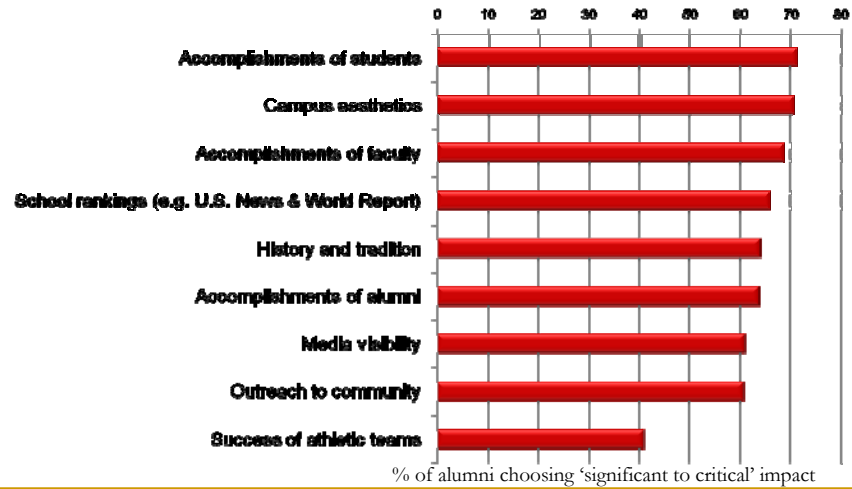
Preliminary findings show that university and alumni association magazines vary widely in the amount of space they allocate to faculty and student research.



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Alumni Preference

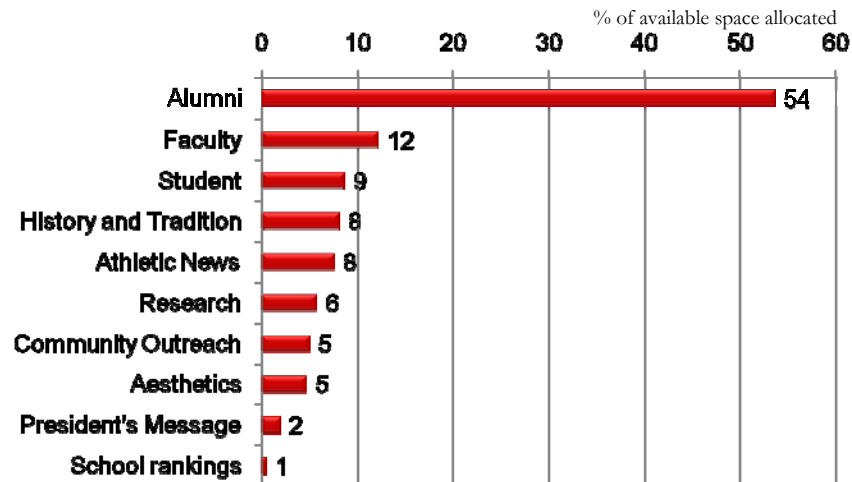
Beyond providing scholarships and increasing the value of the degree to alumni, the following issues have the most impact on alumni's current opinion of the university.



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Magazine Content Allocation

The following content types are most prevalent in university and alumni association magazines.

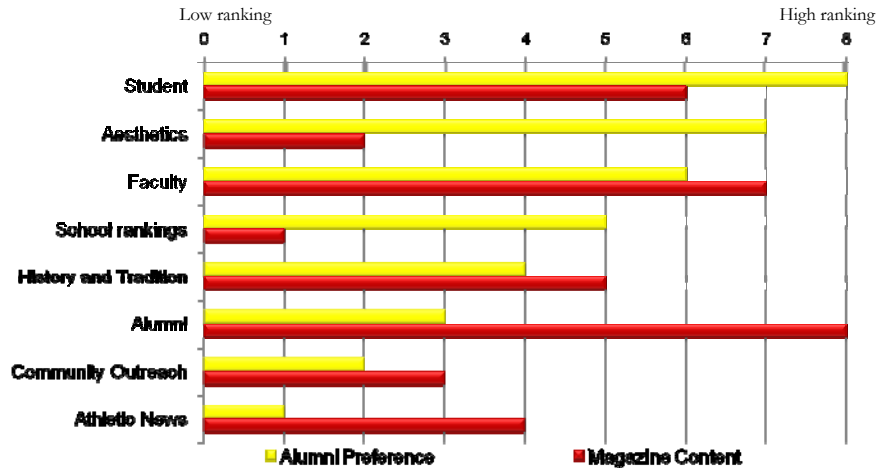


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Content ≠ Preference

Preliminary findings show there is a significant difference between alumni preference and content allocation in university and alumni association magazines.



Rankings based on observed magazine content allocation vs. content types that have 'significant to critical' impact on current alumni opinion of the university.

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