I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the university’s alumni engagement and development strategies have not reached the level of maturity necessary for more robust philanthropic outcomes. More recently, however, as noted during a recent evaluation of the development and alumni program by nationally regarded fund-raising consultants Marts & Lundy, current efforts are benefiting from strategic direction and leadership, greater investment in all aspects of the program, emerging relationships with alumni, friends, and potential donors, and coordinated internal operations that optimize engagement and giving at all levels. In fact, many on campus offer optimism that new campus leadership (including the president, provost and vice president for development and alumni relations) brings a welcome level of commitment, understanding and professionalism in support of UB’s development and alumni relations program. Academic leaders and development/alumni staff believe a high-performing operation can be created with support from the broader university community.

Through the Alumni Engagement and Philanthropy Task Force (see Appendix A for a list of Task Force members), a conversation is underway to create a new UB environment that strengthens alumni engagement, capitalizes on positive student experiences (leading to productive and positive alumni relations), and devises ways to allow the University at Buffalo to achieve its goals and aspirations — both in building a higher, sustainable level of on-going philanthropic support, and, as important, in executing key elements of the UB 2020 plan. If orchestrated effectively, a more robust and coordinated alumni engagement strategy for UB will capitalize on the talents, expertise and connections of our alumni—from establishing job placement and internship opportunities for UB students, to engaging alumni as mentors, career advisors and classroom guests. Over time, an enhanced alumni engagement strategy also will generate deeper connections between UB and its alumni, providing UB with the ability to secure significant new investments in bold initiatives that will deepen and extend our impact—from building a thriving health sciences hub in downtown Buffalo and maintaining access through student scholarships, to recruiting star faculty, funding research, and much more.

II. CHALLENGE

The University at Buffalo is the largest and most comprehensive campus in the SUNY system. Yet, its fund-raising results—in large part a by-product of its overall alumni engagement strategy—have never matched its stature and influence. In order to take its rightful place amongst its AAU peers, UB must increase the market value of its endowment, value of gifts from alumni and friends, and total philanthropic dollars raised. This only will be possible through focused and sustained engagement efforts and a more robust engagement strategy.

As we implement the UB 2020 vision, building strong connections with our alumni worldwide will be critical to our success. Increased alumni engagement is one of the key institutional goals expressed in our Realizing UB 2020 plan, which broadly states, “Engagement is essential to our ability to achieve the overall purpose of the university.” The plan notes especially that, “UB’s 220,000 alumni are a powerful resource for the university. Our alumni are valued friends and help us in many ways, through their engagement in public service on behalf of the university, and as donors, teachers, student mentors and policy advisors. We must expand our efforts to connect our alumni with our strategic efforts. There are
many touch points where alumni can help the university and feel a connection that will lead to increased philanthropic support and strategic participation in future university initiatives.”

III. STATE OF ALUMNI RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Understanding the history, standard practices and outcomes of UB’s alumni relations and development efforts was a critical step towards realizing the Task Force charge. The following general observations were made about the state of alumni relations and development at the university:

- UB alumni can engage with the university in a multitude of ways, some formal and sanctioned by the university (such as volunteering as career mentors through the university’s Career Services Office), and some informal and loosely organized (namely assisting student organizations through outreach by student members of the group). Because of this model, the university does not have a comprehensive understanding of the multi-faceted relationships that UB alumni have with their alma mater.

- UB employs numerous—nearly 50 at the time of this report—staff members who have some responsibility for alumni relations; 14 (or 28%) are formally aligned with the Division of Development and Alumni Relations with primary responsibilities associated with alumni engagement. The balance report through the academic units—often-times with primary responsibilities other than alumni relations. This hybrid structure has not yielded the joint planning, strategic allocation of resources, implementation of best practices, coordination of effort, or economies of scale that are desired.

- New programs/efforts (such as international programming, young alumni programming and career services for alumni) have been slow to develop because of resource limitations.

- The transition from UB student to UB alumnus is not a seamless one. Also, institutional knowledge about student attitudes, activities and interests is not translated to inform and maximize the success of young alumni programming efforts.

- Alumni perceptions and relationships with the university are informed and impacted by numerous factors—some in our control, others not. So too are alumni giving behaviors. *Appendix B demonstrates the varied impacts on alumni giving.*

- Despite the realities of dwindling state funding, UB alumni still view the university as being state supported. Few understand the role of private support at the University at Buffalo.

- Alumni are not sufficiently engaged with the university to inspire the levels of investment desired. Bold ideas, that compel giving, also are lacking. For many, UB is not amongst the top three philanthropies of choice.

- UB’s fund-raising results, endowment levels and overall philanthropic participation rates are below national averages of AAU peers.
IV. PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

As articulated above, alumni relations and development efforts at UB transpire in numerous, disconnected and sometimes less than ideal ways, and staff responsible for alumni relations operate under diffuse reward structures. The Task Force recommends, as a first step in enhancing alumni engagement and philanthropy efforts at UB, that the university adopt principles of practice for alumni relations and development to guide the university’s activities in these two areas. The Task Force proposes the following:

- Alumni engagement activities should produce **outcomes that have impact and are relevant** to the university, our students and the long-term goals of the university, such as increased levels of philanthropic support;

- Alumni engagement efforts should be **mutually beneficial** to the university and alumni and driven by **market research and data**;

- Alumni engagement efforts, when possible, should **enrich student learning experiences** through internships and other experiential learning programs, and position graduates for jobs and success;

- Alumni engagement efforts should provide a **continuum of involvement with the university**, beginning as soon as a student enrolls (if not before) and extending through life;

- Engagement activities will be coordinated by alumni staff at UB to enhance outcomes and to provide a primary “**gateway**” to alumni;

- All UB alumni engagement efforts will be coordinated through **shared systems, core services, and integrated communications**;

- Engagement and communications efforts will **convey the value and strengths of the university**;

- **Sustained relationship building** will be the foundation of all fund-raising and development activities.

- Efforts to create a **culture of awareness** regarding philanthropy at a public research university should **begin as soon as a student enrolls** and extend through life.

- In order to capitalize on the multitude of relationships that exist across the university and throughout our many communities, development and fund-raising activities should be **inclusive of faculty, staff and community partners**.

- UB’s **case** for philanthropic support must be **distinctive and compelling**.

- Consideration will be given to **diversifying and broadening the prospect pool** as new opportunities present themselves.

- Efforts will be tracked through key measures to achieve **maximum impact and efficiency**.
V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Alumni relations and development activities are rightly viewed as support units to the academic core of the university. The central program elements of each are to support the greater good of the university and to help advance the vision, priorities and goals of the academy as articulated by university leadership. With that in mind, the Task Force recommends that the final Realizing 2020 report be used as the roadmap to guide future alumni and development activities, and more specifically, that the emerging priorities of the plan be used to inform how volunteer opportunities for alumni are structured (i.e. career mentors, recruitment ambassadors, internship providers, etc.) and as organizing principles for the university’s next major campaign.

The Task Force also makes seven more specific recommendations and requests for additional funding, detailed below. While the existing budget allocations to alumni relations and development are considered to be adequate for the short term to maintain key programmatic elements and allow for growth in the major and principal gifts fund-raising programs, they will not allow for the targeted enhancements that are necessary for significant growth as recommended by the Task Force. Appendix C summarizes projected costs, Appendix D provides a prioritization of recommendations and Appendix E outlines an implementation timeline.

1. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that furthering the goals of alumni engagement and philanthropic support become a top priority of the University Communications team moving forward. In collaboration with University Communications, the Division of Development and Alumni Relations will develop a strong and consistent university-wide messaging and branding platform that conveys value, fosters alumni engagement and encourages philanthropic support to UB.

    **One-time Costs**
    - Staff time only

    **Recurring Costs**
    - TBD

2. Realizing UB 2020 recognizes that the university’s alumni are a potentially great resource for the institution. It calls for expanded efforts to connect alumni to UB’s strategic initiatives. As a first step toward this enhanced effort, the Task Force recommends that the Office of Alumni Relations study UB alumni attitudes, perceptions, interests and hopes for the university, as well as proactively seek biographical details about alumni that will inform future interactions and engagement efforts. Results of this study will guide program development and communication planning to increase alumni engagement and philanthropy. Results also will be shared with other campus partners, such as Career Services and Enrollment Management, to enhance linkages between students and alumni.

    **One-Time Costs**
    - Alumni attitudes survey and analysis: $50,000

    **Recurring Costs**
    - Alumni biographic data enrichment: $15,000
    - Half-time alumni records staff person to assist with updates pertaining to the added data search and append services listed above: $20,000
    - Alumni attitude survey update (every three years): $15,000
Return on Investment
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
  o Changes in alumni attitudes and perceptions over time once a baseline is established;
  o Increase in alumni records for which we have confirmed business information, email addresses, mobile phone numbers and other forms of contact information;
  o Increased matching gift revenue resulting from added alumni employment records;
  o Increased connections between alumni and students.

3. Alumni engagement efforts should provide a continuum of involvement with the university, beginning as soon as a student enrolls (if not before) and extending through life. In order for the university to better communicate with students/alumni and understand potential future interest areas, the institution must invest in a data solution that captures student/alumni engagement and volunteer activities. The Task Force recommends that the co-curricular transcript (once fully implemented) be used to inform this data collection for students. Additionally, the Task Force recommends that investment be made in a software package that can be utilized to better capture the alumni volunteer and engagement activities across the university, thereby improving our knowledge of and about alumni relationships with UB.

One-Time Costs
  o Conduct a comprehensive review of parent and student data elements that are available across existing campus systems that can be used to inform the engagement and development process: Staff time only
  o Expand use of existing software system to better capture alumni volunteer and engagement activities across campus: Staff time only

Recurring Costs
  o Half-time alumni records staff person to assist with loading and maintaining relevant parent and senior data in the AWA system, as well as collecting and capturing relevant volunteer, activity and engagement data: $25,000

Return on Investment
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
  o Increased number of alumni and senior records for which we have confirmed co-curricular transcript information;
  o Increased number of records for which we have updated parent information;
  o Increased number of biographical elements for alumni.

4. On average, major donors, make their first gift to the University at Buffalo 12 years after graduation and then make their largest gift 25 years later. To increase donor participation and decrease the time it takes for alumni to make first and subsequent gifts to the university, UB will need to engage significantly more young alumni, much earlier in the alumni life cycle, using emerging technologies (such as social media) that appeal to younger audiences. The Task Force recommends that the university develop a young alumni program that focuses on early and thoughtful engagement, and ties the experiences to interest areas of the former students. This request would require an investment of both staff and operational resources.
One-Time Costs
None

Recurring Costs
- Two full-time staff members dedicated to developing and implementing a robust young alumni engagement program: $100,000
- Operational expenses: $175,000
- Enhance UB’s alumni web portal/social media presence to be in line with those of peer institutions and more appealing/user-friendly to a young alumni audience: $25,000

Return on Investment
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
- Increased volume of young alumni engagement and giving levels;
- Increased engagement and collaboration captured on alumni web portal.

5. With the job market in flux, universities are seeing an increase in alumni reaching back to their alma maters for career services and planning. As UB works to expand outreach efforts to alumni, providing additional services to those who find themselves changing careers or seeking employment is one way of enhancing the relationships between UB and its alumni. The Task Force thus recommends that the university invest in a more robust career services program for alumni, initially focused on young alumni audiences. This request would require an investment of both staff and operational resources.

One-Time Costs
None

Recurring Costs
- Two full-time staff, placed within UB’s existing career services infrastructure, to implement a pilot program providing career services to young alumni which includes: one-on-one consultation, developing relationships with corporate recruiting partners, and organizing various networking events, webinars, and workshops: $100,000
- Operational expenses: $100,000

Return on Investment
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
- Volume and trends in program participation;
- Giving and affinity levels, over time, of young alumni who participate in the pilot program versus those who do not.

6. For the past several years, alumni participation in philanthropic giving has been decreasing at UB. This decrease results from a growing alumni body (approx. 3% increase per year) and a shrinking number of alumni donors (approx. 6% decrease per year). To grow annual giving, the Task Force recommends two primary tactics for consideration, namely reinvestment in the university’s phone solicitation program (i.e. increasing the number of calls made to renew and solicit gifts) and increasing leadership annual giving, primarily through personal cultivation, stewardship and solicitation. This request would require an investment of both staff and operational resources.
**One-Time Costs**
None

**Recurring Costs**
- Two full-time staff members: $185,000
- Operational expenses: $35,000
- 15,000 additional alumni and parent calls: $25,000
- Conduct annual fund impact surveys regularly: $5,000
- Develop and test different donor acquisition and retention strategies: Staff time only

**Return on Investment**
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
- Increased alumni participation levels compared to the time period before implementation;
- Increased annual giving compared to the time period before implementation.

7. Philanthropic support received from faculty and staff is a strong indicator to external constituents of internal buy-in and support of the UB vision and goals. Over the last several years, faculty and staff giving participation levels have been diminishing. The Task Force recommends that the university fully address the issue of faculty/staff giving and make a significant effort to increase levels of giving and participation in general.

**One-Time Costs**
None

**Recurring Costs**
TBD—as the program evolves and success is achieved, additional staff and operational expenses may be incurred to maintain the program.

**Return on Investment**
A review of industry best practices suggests that an investment in this area will lead to higher philanthropic outcomes for UB. Specific measures to evaluate improvement in this area are as follows:
- Increased faculty/staff participation levels compared to the time period before implementation;
- Increased annual giving compared to the time period before implementation.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to create a high-performing, sustainable, overall program, the university must establish and nurture an overarching commitment to the engagement of alumni and establish clear and strategic engagement paths over a lifetime of volunteer activity and giving. Performance improvements are certainly feasible and predictable based upon key factors. That said, it will only be possible with a university commitment and willingness to make the work of alumni engagement a priority.
Appendix A
Alumni Engagement and Philanthropy Task Force
Membership

Nancy Wells, Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations (CHAIR)

Arjang Assad, Dean, School of Management

John Della Contrada, Assistant Vice President for Media Relations, University Communications

Jay Friedman, Sr. Director, Special Events, Development and Alumni Relations

Daniel Ovadia, Student Representative, UB Council

Barbara Ricotta, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

Edward Schneider, Executive Director, UB Foundation

Scott Weber, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Larry Zielinski, Past President, UB Alumni Association Board of Directors

STAFF

David Draper, Assistant Vice President for Principal Gifts, Development and Alumni Relations

Kathleen Heckman, Assistant Vice President for Operations, Development and Alumni Relations

Gary Mahon, Director, Resource Management, Development and Alumni Relations
Appendix B
Spheres of Influence—Alumni Giving
## Appendix C

### Summary of Costs Associated with Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Force Recommendations</th>
<th>One-Time Cost</th>
<th>Recurring Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish increasing alumni engagement and philanthropic support as top priority for</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>staff time only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>university communications efforts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assess UB alumni attitudes, perceptions, interests and hopes for the university and</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proactively seek biographical details about alumni that will inform future interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and engagement efforts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use co-curricular transcript to inform data collection for students and better utilize</td>
<td>staff time</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>existing software to capture alumni, parent and volunteer engagement activities across</td>
<td>only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the university.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Build-out a young alumni program that focuses on early and thoughtful engagement and</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ties the experiences to interest areas of the former students.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Build a robust career services program for young alumni.</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Increase annual giving and alumni participation, and build fundraising capacity at the</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annual leadership level ($1K-$24,999 gifts).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increase levels of faculty/staff giving and participation.</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>TBD - may increase in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTALS:** $50,000 $825,000
### Appendix D
Prioritization of Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Force Recommendations</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish increasing alumni engagement and philanthropic support as top priority for university communications efforts.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assess UB alumni attitudes, perceptions, interests and hopes for the university and proactively seek biographical details about alumni that will inform future interactions and engagement efforts.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use co-curricular transcript to inform data collection for students and better utilize existing software to capture alumni, parent and volunteer engagement activities across the university.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Build a young alumni program that focuses on early and thoughtful engagement and ties the experiences to interest areas of the former students.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Build a robust career services program for young alumni.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Increase annual giving and alumni participation, and build fund-raising capacity at the annual leadership level ($1K-$24,999 gifts).</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Increase levels of faculty/staff giving and participation.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E
Proposed Implementation Timeline

Develop university-wide messaging and branding platform that supports alumni engagement and encourages philanthropic support.

R2. Apr 2014 – May 2014
Conduct alumni attitude survey.

R3. Apr 2014 – Aug 2014
Investigate use of co-curricular transcript.

R4. Sept 2014
Expand annual giving calls and personal outreach efforts.

R5. Sept 2014 – Feb 2015
Analyze results of alumni attitude survey.

Apply findings of alumni attitude survey to efforts.

R7. May 2014 – Aug 2014
Expand AWA system for enhanced data collection.

Develop young alumni program.

Implement faculty/staff giving plan that showcases current faculty/staff donors and utilizes volunteer/peer involvement.

Pilot career services program for young alumni.