



BUR '18: Alumni: University Reputation Ambassadors

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The Building Universities' Reputation conference series (BUR) provides an opportunity to study the scope and relevance of university reputation.

Based on the definition of reputation as “perceived quality”, these conferences aim to highlight the fact that a university’s good image is based on objective criteria, i.e. academic quality, and can benefit from an effective communication campaign.

Developing a reputation calls for a 360-degree perspective that takes in the university’s different stakeholders, including students, employees, companies and employers, regulators and the local community. The university establishes a relationship and a dialogue with these groups. It keeps them informed, takes into account their opinions and expectations. The university not only teaches, but also learns.

BUR 2017 examined reputation from the perspective of the student, who is the centre of the university’s activity and its driving force. The conference speakers stressed the importance of nurturing this relationship, which covers the student’s complete “life cycle” (before, during and after attending university), and providing students with a service they consider satisfactory. In short, the university’s good reputation hinges on its students’ reputation. If they do well, the university is understood to have accomplished a major part of its mission.

In this year’s edition, which will be held on October 2nd - 4th 2018 in Madrid, the focus will be on the role of alumni as “reputation ambassadors”. After reflecting on the student’s role, the next logical step to provide continuity and variety to the conference cycle by examining the role of another group of stakeholders: alumni.

This topic does, in fact, offer great continuity, given that alumni’s connection begins and is strengthened by their time as university students. When students’ experience is positive and memorable, a sense of belonging is created that can last for the rest of their lives.

This affective and moral connection generates a sense of responsibility that leads them to contribute resources to help future generations of university students. Alumni get involved in different ways, such as by participating in curricular and extracurricular activities, sharing their experiences and offering advice.

Of the many different ways of collaborating, two deserve special mention: the first involves providing help through job placement, one of the topics of greatest concern to university students, and the other is financial contributions in the form of scholarships and other kinds of financial aid, especially funding for research.

But the university should not simply ask alumni for help. By virtue of this long-lasting relationship, the university also has to give alumni something of relevance. New technologies make it easy to send them information about online and on-campus continuing education programmes. Furthermore, alumni have concerns about their professional careers when they start their first job and in every stage of their career path. The university can also provide alumni with professional networking opportunities and events. These help them maintain the personal bonds formed during their student days at their alma mater.

Alumni relations involve taking a long-term approach that begins with ensuring proper attention is paid to students during their time at university. It is also important to stay in touch with them upon graduation by providing good job-placement service, maintaining close relations with companies, and offering an up-to-date list of continuing educational activities.

Due to alumni mobility, performing these tasks is impossible without good organization and technological support, especially in terms of attracting funding.

Students' relationship with the university is a long-term bond. When this relationship is nurtured, the university continues to be a valuable resource for alumni, who are thus prompted to give back to their university. If a stable bond is established, alumni can play an active role in building the university's reputation. They are the best ambassadors for potential students, donors and employers. A committed former student is a clear indicator of quality.

These topics and many others will be discussed at the BUR 2018 conference. International speakers will be on hand to share their expertise, and audience participation will be fundamental to enrich the program. It will be a unique opportunity to strengthen relations between the university and alumni.