

Frequently Asked Questions regarding the Alumni Board Transition

Q: Why is this change necessary?

A: The results of the all-alumni survey (fielded in May 2019) support the need to re-envision a volunteer leadership structure to support the Alumni Association, with specific attention to greater representation from across the MBU family, to include greater diversity of age, ethnicity, gender, degree programs, affinity groups, etc. In that survey, more than 45% of respondents indicated that an alumni association board should reflect all MBU programs and areas, with over 36% indicating a preference for a combination of appointed and elected board representatives (to be established via election ballot by fiscal year 2022).

Additionally, evolving the focus and structure of the alumni board has been a topic of conversation among former and sitting alumni boards and their executive committees/leadership for some time, as they recognized the opportunity to optimize operations and better serve MBU's increasingly diverse alumni community. Advancing the structure to create an organization that is more closely aligned with the university's strategic goals will benefit both the university and the Alumni Association, while also reflecting best practices in alumni engagement. What's more, this approach was a key recommendation from a national higher-ed advancement consulting firm Graham Pelton.

From the MBU 2025 Strategic Plan:

“We are committed to our more than 17,000 living alumni who are the embodiment of Mary Baldwin. Having completed a comprehensive alumni survey at the time of plan implementation, it is clear that a renewed focus on our graduates is imperative following the significant series of transitions undertaken in the past ten years—especially the college-to-university shift and the move to residential coeducation. Mary Baldwin will create, invest in, and sustain a robust alumni engagement program that builds upon the loyalty and affinities of our alumni, even as we establish new approaches to cultivating upcoming and recent graduates of the new university structure. We will engage and equip our graduates to pursue lifelong learning and to inspire the students who follow them. Finally, the university is committed to offering best-in-class stewardship to our alumni donors and friends as we work together to realize the promise of the vibrant institution we cherish.”

Q: What are other universities doing in this space? What are best practices?

A: Industry best practice is to have an alumni board that is aligned with and supported/managed by its institution/organization. In an optimized environment, it is the university's responsibility to set the priorities for engagement and philanthropy, and provide opportunities for meaningful service, stewardship for that service, and develop a pipeline of volunteers. In turn, volunteer leaders support the goals, mission, and strategic plans of the institution via service, lending of skills/talents, connections to personal and professional networks, and financial philanthropic support. The university and Office of Alumni Engagement will continue to use benchmarking and best practices in alumni engagement as they implement

current and future alumni engagement strategy. They will also evaluate the offering of alumni programs and services to ensure that the Alumni Association/university is meeting the needs of its diverse constituency through inclusive measures.

Q: How will this new board structure enable the delivery of programming alumni are most interested in, per the alumni survey?

Under the direction of the Offices of University Advancement and Alumni Engagement, the new board structure, called the Alumni Leadership Board, will support the university in its role and responsibility to serve the over 17,000 alumni. The new structure will support the work of the Office of Alumni Engagement to enhance the mission and strategic goals/priorities of the university through the delivery of alumni programs and services to meet the needs of all alumni, especially the needs identified in the all-alumni survey.

The membership structure of the new Alumni Leadership Board will be composed of a chairperson overseeing each of the seven open-committees that directly support the initiatives derived from the all-alumni survey. The open-committees are as follows: communications, regional engagement, career/mentoring, lifelong learning, philanthropy/stewardship, and events/programs.

By design, the structure of the Alumni Leadership Board allows the university to bring this new volunteer board under the umbrella of the university and broaden the scope of their work away from strictly defined committees. This pivot will allow the work of the new board and its supporting open-committees to be broad in delivery while aligning with the areas of greatest programmatic needs as identified by the alumni community. In response to the all-alumni survey feedback, the future Alumni Leadership Board will have combined appointed and elected by ballot (open to all alumni) positions.

Q: What is the plan for transitioning from the Alumni Board to a new alumni volunteer leadership board/group?

A: The sitting board will receive communication from the university in July, regarding the approach to building a new board. The sitting board will have a first-look at future volunteer opportunities and ample opportunity to participate in any and all open-committee initiatives. The approach to recruiting new board members will be broad and expansive, with all-alumni calls to action over the next two years, with a goal to put the new board into operation in June/July 2021, and continue to recruit to a fully seated board by the end of June/July 2022. Any alumna/us will have an opportunity to volunteer in any of the following open-committees: communications, regional engagement, career/mentoring, lifelong learning, philanthropy/stewardship, and events/programs.

The new Alumni Leadership Board will be announced and begin work in July 2021. This timeline allows for the university to test and assess what programs and services are indeed meaningful and of value to the broader alumni community. The results of this evaluation will also inform how

the leadership group should be organized to support those identified and validated programs/initiatives.

Q: Has the current alumni board been informed of the plan? Did they have input?

The need to revise the alumni structure to deliver against the mandates of the all-alumni survey was communicated in October 2019 to the sitting Alumni Board. Following this communication, the executive committee of the Alumni Board was asked by the university to work in collaboration with the Board of Trustees in the creation of a path forward that would best serve all alumni in this new era. These two groups worked with the university to create an Alumni Volunteer Task Force to collaborate with the university on its new direction.

Q: What will happen to the current alumni board with this transition?

A: We anticipate that the current alumni board will disband, and it is our hope that they will support the path to a new board in service of their fellow alumni. They will be invited to participate in new alumni volunteer initiatives alongside all members of the alumni community. Throughout the preparation of this transition, there has been a participatory process in which several former leaders of the current and past boards have been involved in providing feedback, insight, and opinion on a proposed path forward. The university continues to seek that partnership with alumni leaders and will look to the various levels of alumni leadership to continue to be involved moving forward.

Q: Are you dissolving the Alumni Association?

A: Absolutely not. Founded in 1893, the Mary Baldwin Alumni Association has a proud, storied legacy and an even brighter future. More than 17,000 alumni strong, it has and always will be composed of every student who has attended at least one semester at Mary Baldwin, is in good standing, and is inclusive of degree-holding, non-degree holding, and honorary alumni.

The Alumni Association and the Alumni Board are distinct entities. The purpose of the Alumni Association is to support and serve the university's alumni across all programs at Mary Baldwin University, and as such, its financial and operational management is under the direction of the university. The Alumni Board is a volunteer leadership organization, and does not have any fiduciary responsibilities to Mary Baldwin. Its governing documents/bylaws are written as such that the board is outside the realm of university governance.

Q: Who has been involved in this process?

A: Alumni members of the Board of Trustees, along with the executive committee of the alumni board have formed an Alumni Volunteer Task Force which began its work in December 2019, meeting several times throughout the course of 2020. The task force, with the support and direction of the leadership of the Board of Trustees, has worked closely and collaboratively with university administrators and alumni engagement staff to develop this transition plan that preserves the essential role of volunteer leaders while ensuring that the interests of Mary Baldwin's 17,000 plus alumni are served. The university will continue to engage current and former alumni volunteer leaders to be engaged in supporting this transition.

Q: How will the new board that is formed in 2021 be chosen?

A: During the infancy of operation, the university will select provisional leaders for the open-volunteer committees. These individuals will also serve on the Alumni Leadership Board by virtue of their committee leadership roles. The committees will support the initiatives derived from the all-alumni survey and participation is open to all alumni, enabling the university to engage more alumni in a volunteer capacity. The open-committees are as follows: communications, regional engagement, career/mentoring, lifelong learning, philanthropy/stewardship, and events/programs.

This open committee approach allows a broad spectrum of volunteers to have a seat at the table. Returning, long-time/highly engaged, and new volunteers are expected to join the efforts moving forward. As committees are formed initially, the Office of Alumni Engagement will serve as the primary point of contact for the facilitation of the meetings and volunteer managers. Leadership is expected to emerge organically within the open-volunteer committees. The Offices of University Advancement and Alumni Engagement will also engage potential leadership candidates who are recommended by a variety of MB stakeholders, including past presidents of the Alumni Board. The university will move to an elected ballot (open to all alumni) by the fiscal year 2022.