



Affinity Group- Handbook

2014-2015

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I. **Welcome Message/Introduction**

On behalf of the Alumnae/i Relations Office and the Alumnae/i Board of Directors, thank you for volunteering with the affinity program at Wheaton College. Affinity program volunteers are a vital part of the Wheaton Alumnae/i Association. Volunteers help foster a sense of connection between alumnae/i of shared interests and encourage them to stay connected with Wheaton.

This Handbook is designed to answer questions regarding affinity group leadership responsibilities, event planning, and communication with affinity alumnae/i and the Alumnae/i Relations Office.

The Alumnae/i Board of Directors and the Alumnae/i Relations Office staff are ready to assist in any way possible.

Thank you for volunteering for Wheaton!

II. History of Volunteerism

The Alumnae Association has been based on volunteerism since its inception by the Class of 1870. Prior to the Association, there were several regional alumnae groups, namely the New York Wheaton Female Seminary Alumnae Club, and the New England Wheaton Female Seminary Alumnae Club, both of which grew out of the women's club movement of the 1860s and 70s. These too were based on volunteers planning meetings, lunches, or offering to give or arrange talks on various subjects. These women also urged the Board of Trustees to include women as well as alumnae to the Board, and eventually succeeded in 1896.

Later, once the Association gained a presence on campus (1921), the actual activities of the Association continued to be based on volunteers, meeting locally and planning dinners and fund raising projects for scholarships. This grew into the Annual Fund (now the Wheaton Fund), which developed out of a Board committee.

Since then, as with many such clubs, most of the activity is carried on by volunteers, rather than the administrative staff on campus.

Today, Wheaton has more than one thousand volunteers, who work with the Alumnae/i Relations Office and various departments on campus, serve on the Alumnae/i Board, work with the Wheaton Fund, provide internships, serve as career mentors, lead regional club activities, and so much more.

III. Recognition model

To be formally recognized by the College as a part of our affinity program, an alumnae/i group must meet the following criteria:

- The group must have a governing board (board of directors or steering committee) elected with members elected to specific positions for set terms.
- The governing board must communicate regularly, and must plan at least two events per fiscal year.
- The governing board must be in regular contact with the Alumnae/i Relations Office through the Coordinator for Volunteer Stewardship and Affinity Programs.
- The group must develop and adopt a mission statement that clearly defines how it will support the College, alumnae/i, and current students.
- The group must adopt a name that describes their related affinity. The name should include “Wheaton College” (e.g. *Wheaton College Gentlemen Callers Alumni Union*).
- Where appropriate, the group should serve to connect alumnae/i with current students who share the affinity around which the group is organized.

IV. HOW TO START AN ALUMNAE/I AFFINITY GROUP

The recognition model on the previous page describes the ideal structure of an affinity group once it is up and running. There is a lot of work that happens between the first conversation about forming a group and actually having a group that conforms to this model, and the Alumnae/I Relations Office is there to help with every step. The following is a guide for how alumnae/i who are interested in becoming affinity program volunteers can begin the conversation and move towards establishing a formal affinity group.

STEPS TO BECOMING AN ALUMNAE/I AFFINITY GROUP

1. INITIAL REQUEST

- Ensure that the affinity group that you wish to create does not already exist. Anyone interested in finding existing affinity groups should contact the Coordinator for Affinity Programs in Wheaton's Office of Alumnae/i Relations.
- Once you have determined that there is no existing program in your area of interest, contact the Coordinator for Affinity Programs and indicate your interest in forming a group. Initial contact can be through email (mackie_gavin@wheatoncollege.edu) or phone (508-586-5687).

2. INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSION

- After the request is received, the Coordinator for Affinity Programs will contact the person(s) who made the request to schedule an initial discussion, either in person or via phone or skype.
- The discussion will include the individual's relation to Wheaton College; the number of other alumnae/i who are interested in forming the group; the list of alumnae/i associated with the proposed group, if applicable; affiliations with organizations; ideas for events, sustainability, and related student groups, etc.

3. SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL

- Following this meeting, the Coordinator for Affinity Programs will work with interested parties to complete the application form found at the end of this handbook.
- Once the form has been completed and approved by the Alumnae/i Relations Office and the Alumnae/I Board of Directors has been notified of the new group, the Coordinator for Affinity programs will be in contact with interested parties to being forming a governing board and planning events.

VI. Helpful Resources

We would like to provide affinity groups with helpful resources throughout the planning stages of the group. These resources will be particularly helpful for groups that have not been on campus for a number of years. Alumnae/i can also contact the Coordinator of Affinity Programs in the Alumnae/i Relations Office at any time with questions, or for help in planning and executing events. If an alumnae/i group is planning on-campus events through student groups, or through other offices like SAIL or the Career Center, the Coordinator of Affinity Programs should be included in any communications to ensure the Alumnae/i Relations Office can accurately track group activity.

- a. Institution Calendar: Wheaton's calendar can be found here (wheatoncollege.edu/calendar/)
 - First Year Move In → Wheaton starts the semester with First Year orientation. Does your group want to connect with new students? This might be a good weekend to say "Hello!" This weekend also provides groups the opportunity to volunteer on campus as a helping hand during the move in process.
 - Homecoming → Wheaton shines in the fall! Homecoming is a weekend for alumnae/i to come back to Wheaton and enjoy the Dimple, sporting events, and the company of their fellow Wheaties'. Homecoming is also a great weekend to showcase affinity programs. If a group plans to hold events at Wheaton at all during the year, Homecoming Weekend should be one of the focal points for planning.
 - Winter Break → As a reminder, Wheaton closes during the winter break, typically around December 23 or 24. Typically offices re-open on January 2nd, and students do not return until the end of the month. Please be aware that the offices are closed and it helps to plan ahead.
 - Spring Break → Wheaton students have a spring break during March. If there is an event being proposed with students during the spring, please be aware of their break.
 - Commencement/Reunion → Commencement/Reunion weekend is a GREAT time to come back to campus and congratulate the graduating class. Campus is beautiful and bustling and is ready to host groups for social gatherings or official meetings.
- b. Communications- There are a number of contacts at Wheaton to help communicate with affinity groups:
 - The Alumnae/i Relations Office can help provide emails and mailing addresses for members and potential members, but only to steering committee/board of directors members of officially recognized groups.
 - The Alumnae/i Relations Office can also help send emails on behalf of groups and Wheaton.

- Social media can also be a convenient way to contact members (see below).
 - Communications should include details for upcoming events and meetings, meeting minutes, and follow up materials and information about events of interest on campus.
 - Having constant communication with group members (when appropriate and relevant) will keep group members engaged in the group and in turn can increase participation throughout the year.
- c. Invitations: When inviting the affinity group to an event or meeting there are a few key items to include on the invite:
- Location
 - Date
 - Time
 - RSVP requirements – indicate if the RSVP is regrets only, required, and if there is a deadline.
 - A brief description on the purpose - Is this a social gathering? Will there be food? Is it a business meeting?
 - If necessary, provide details about where on the web your invitees can find additional information either on Facebook or the Wheaton website.
 - Contact person – include a name, email or telephone number someone can reach out to with additional questions.
- d. Social media outreach ideas :
- Facebook – create a page, invite members and use it as a means to communicate with your group. Facebook can be a less formal way to contact group members and keep members engaged.
 - Email lists –Ask group members to provide their most up to date email addresses to communicate with the group during the planning stages. The Alumnae/i Relations Office can provide email lists to members of the steering committee or board of directors once the group is officially recognized, but often the information that the college has is incomplete. Please remember that information can change and that maintaining an updated list is beneficial. Typically, email communications are more formal and result in a specific outcome.
 - Hashtags – Wheaton has begun to use hashtags to promote their events through social media. Before coming to campus for Homecoming or Commencement/Reunion look for Wheaton’s hashtag and encourage members to use it on statuses, photos, and tweets!
- e. Other Tips and Tricks:
- Please note Wheaton needs details for an event at least 8 weeks prior in order to help advertise. Please make sure to inform the Office of Alumnae/i Relations of any planned events, on or off campus. This is especially important when working with student groups or with other departments on campus.

- Remember that the Coordinator for Affinity Programs is here to support affinity groups and their members. Please don't hesitate to solicit help for any questions or problems that may arise.

VII. Affinity Program FAQ

Q: What is an affinity group?

A: An affinity group is a structured group of people who have come together to organize around a common interest. An affinity might be related to a group someone participated in while a student at Wheaton, their current profession, or any other group one might identify with.

Q: Can I start my own affinity group?

A: Yes! Our affinity program is entirely driven by alumnae/i. For tips on starting a group, please refer to the handbook section on Starting Your Own Affinity Group. If unsure of whether or not the alumnae/i network already supports a group related to the desired affinity, contact the Coordinator for Affinity Programs, Gavin Mackie, at mackie_gavin@wheatoncollege.edu.

Q: I'm not sure if there is enough interest in _____ to start a group?

A: If there is interest from one alumna/us, chances are there are other alumnae/i out there who share that same interest! Affinity groups can vary greatly in size, and as long as there is enough interest to form a governing board and hold regular events, the Alumnae/I Relations Office is more than happy to help get the group started. The Coordinator of Affinity Programs can also be a helpful resource in connecting with other alumnae/i who might share the interest.

Q: What kind of support can my group expect from the college?

A: Wheaton's affinity program is relatively new, and currently support for various affinity groups is determined on an individual basis. There is a dedicated staff member who is here to help new and existing groups with organizational support. Additionally, financial support may be available for events and activities. Applications for financial support will be considered on an individual basis, and will be available only to officially recognized affinity groups.

V. Application

Affinity Program Application and Recognition Form

Name: _____ Class year: _____

Did you go by any other names while attending Wheaton? _____

What will be the name of your proposed affinity group?

Note: each Wheaton College affinity group's name should be in the following format: *Wheaton College [affinity group name]* - determined upon review of your application. Example: *Wheaton College Rugby Union*.

Please provide a brief description of your affinity group:

Identity Based Career/Professional Student Activity Other

Give us a history of your group. Include when you began informally meeting, how long and how often you have been informally meeting?

Who will be the main contact for your Affinity group? What is your preferred method of communication?

E-mail Telephone/ Cell (Please list number)

Name: _____

Contact email: _____

Contact number: _____

Note: We encourage you to create an email address that is specific to your affinity group

Does your Affinity group have a Governing Board? Yes No

If yes, how often does the board meet: _____

Note: If your group does not currently have a governing board, please contact the Coordinator for Affinity Programs as soon as possible to begin planning the organization of a governing board.

Please list the names and class years of members who will be assuming leadership positions in your affinity group and their contact information including email. Identify what role and responsibilities they will have. You may also attach a copy of your list with its corresponding roles.

Affinity group Goals:

What is the mission statement around which this group will organize?

How will you work to achieve this mission (through events, outreach, etc...)?

Are any other Wheaton College affinity groups, or other Wheaton College affiliates (whether formal or informal), active in your area? If yes, please list them and list the name of the alumane/i who is the liaison.

Signature

Date

IXX.

Affinity Program Group Renewal Form

INFRASTRUCTURE

Please list the name of your affinity group:

Please list the names, class years and email addresses of your organizing volunteers:

Please list the names, class years and email addresses of your members:

Are you the group's main contact? Yes No (if no, please provide that contact name below)

What is your preferred method of communication?

E-mail Telephone/ Cell (please provide number): _____

Affinity group standing

Please check all that apply for your group:

Website. url: _____

Email _____

Listserv _____

Membership Database _____

Facebook presence _____

Linked-In presence _____

Other _____

Does your group:

Submit affinity group events to the Alumnae/i Relations staff for the Wheaton Quarterly and the alumnae/i events calendar? Yes No

Include your Wheaton College staff member in all your mailings, e-mails and listservs? Yes No

Please estimate how frequently your group communicates with its constituents using any of the following methods. *(Check one per line)*

	Never	Annually	Quarterly	Monthly	2/3 per month	4+ per month
Email event/activity notices						
Mail event/activity notices						
If your group has a website, how often is it updated?						
Publish newsletter (print or electronically)						
Advertise meetings and events on social media websites						

Affinity group growth

1. What would you say is your affinity group's biggest accomplishment for this past year?

2. How does your group attract new members?

3. What would your affinity group say is its biggest strength?

4. In what areas would you like to see your affinity group grow?

5. What was your affinity group's biggest challenge this past academic year?

PROGRAMMING

Please list a summary of your events for the past fiscal year (July 201x – June 201x). Please check off the correct column describing the type of event hosted. Please also indicate if the event was organized by you or an outside group, and include attendance numbers wherever possible. *Use additional pages as needed.*

A. Type of event:

- PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING EDUCATIONAL CULTURAL
 SOCIAL

B. EVENT DESCRIPTION:

C. Organized by:

- Affinity group Wheaton College Student Group

D. Event Attendance

Feedback

Please use this section to provide any feedback, comments and suggestions

1. How often do you communicate with the Wheaton College Alumnae/i Relations staff?
2. Has your Affinity group felt supported by the Wheaton College Alumnae/i Relations staff?
3. Does your affinity group have any suggestions for how Wheaton College can better support the group?

Please provide any other feedback: