UI∞P Strengthening University-Industry Partnerships

Role of Alumni in Advancing University-Industry Partnerships

December 2020 | n=81

Alumni can be instrumental in strengthening relationships across the university-industry (U-I) engagement spectrum . For example, Zaib And Amir Husain, alumni tech entrepreneurs, donated $5 million in 2020 to launch a machine learning laboratory at the University of Texas at Austin to house a new NSF-funded Artificial Intelligence Institute, and the University of Florida's AI partnership with NVIDIA was anchored by a $50 million gift from NVIDIA founder and UF alumnus Chris Malachowsky.

At the recommendation of a member organization, UIDP surveyed member representatives to learn their perspectives on the role that alumni play in advancing U-I partnerships. A majority of respondents were university employees with 27% from industry or other research organizations.

UIDP asked respondents to rate the relative importance of alumni in advancing university-industry partnerships. **Nearly four out of five (78.8%) responded that the importance of alumni was high or very high**, with only 4% rating the importance as low or very low. Among industry respondents, 73% rated this question high or very high.

Rate the importance of alumni in advancing U-I partnerships

High, 60%   Very high, 19%   Average, 18%   Low, 3%   1% ▶ Very low...
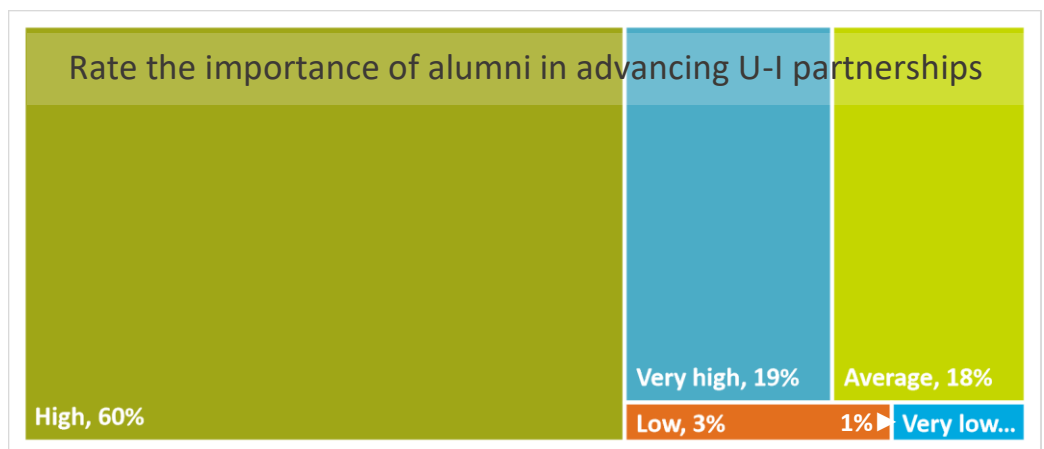
Despite this high rating, **more than half of the respondents said their organizations do not have a formal strategy** for leveraging alumni to advance U-I partnerships, and nearly 10% did not know whether their organizations had such a strategy.

Given this disparity**, a strong majority of respondents (78%) said this was a topic ripe for further exploration by UIDP**.

Discussion and comments uncovered several challenges:

- Tracking alumni relationships tends to fall in the domain of universities. Corporations don't usually track this.
- Fiscal ability rests with decision-makers in industry, so finding a highly-placed champion is key.
- Basing the industry talent pipeline on alumni relationships may narrow diversity of thought. Companies should look for new ideas in unexpected places
- Relationships must align industry need with value from academia.

Do you have a formal strategy?

Don't know 10%   Yes 36%   No 54%

Should UIDP explore this topic further?

Yes, 77.9%   No, 16.2%   Other, 5.9%