



*2012 LEAP PROJECT: TEAM 4*  
*COUGAR NETWORK*

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## Executive Summary

The vast majority of colleges and universities have active alumni organizations that represent a significant resource to the institution. In fact, in a review of the web sites of the top ten national universities, as ranked by U.S. News and World Report, each of these institutions prominently displayed links to their alumni portal on their home page. Additionally, a random search of an additional ten universities and colleges produced the same result of 100% inclusion of the alumni portal on the institution's home page.

The prominence of the alumni portal on the above referenced web sites clearly demonstrates the importance that these institutions place on maintaining an active, vibrant and engaged alumni base. This web site prominence is testimony to their belief that alumni organizations play a vital role in the success of the college or university. Support is provided in numerous ways ranging from attendance at sporting and cultural events, career and business networking and, of course, the all-important area of fundraising. Also, distinguished former students can be helpful to a college too as they raise the institution's profile. Essentially the school gets a certain level of bragging rights when college alumni have a certain profile or status. Most alumni associations are keen to utilize such notoriety to maintain and strengthen their connection to the broader base of past and future alumni as well as prospective students.

After more than 40 years of operation and serving more than 363,000 students, College of the Canyons (COC) has yet to establish a coordinated, sustained effort to attract alumni support and membership in an alumni organization. Informal discussions have determined that several COC departments, organizations and even individual faculty members maintain networks with former students. The COC Foundation has perhaps the most established alumni network as part of the Foundation maintained Alumni & Friends program. Founded in 2000, the Alumni & Friends program has over 4,600 email addresses and just less than 300 members.

LEAP team #4 believes that the college is missing out on a significant opportunity to garner broad and meaningful support from its alumni base. The team is proposing to create a robust alumni portal to provide alumni a forum to belong to a mutual interest network of fellow COC alumni while they connect and support each other and the college.



## Project Mission and Objectives

### Mission

Launch a simple and user-friendly online portal to build and maintain a robust connection to COC alumni

### Key Objectives

Use the online portal for:

- Communicating regularly
- Raising awareness
- Promoting a sense of community
- Offering services
- Engaging active alumni involvement and support



## Start-up Summary

In order to launch a new portal, the project will require buy-in from the campus leadership team and allocation of internal resources (soft costs) and a modest budget for out-of-pocket costs.

Internal resources, primarily from the Information Systems organization, will need to be committed to create the website and Cougar Network database as well as links to existing college communication channels.

Additionally, a moderate budget for out-of-pocket expenses is recommended to promote the features and benefits of the Cougar Network and jump-start alumni registration. Alternatively, a much more modest promotional effort can be undertaken with the consequence being extending the length of time needed to achieve a significant member base and reducing the ten-year return on investment well below the level predicted in the Financial Analysis shown at the end of this business plan.



## Market Analysis Summary

### Target Audience

For the purpose of inclusion in the Cougar network, an alumnus is defined as:

1. Any graduate or former student at College of the Canyons
2. Anyone who has a current College of the Canyons student I.D.
3. Anyone who has taken a class or not-for-credit training program through College of the Canyons

The primary target audience is comprised of the 360,000+ individual alumni who have attended classes at COC since the college was founding in 1969. This target audience also includes the 62% of COC faculty and staff who are COC alumni.

The secondary target audience includes individuals in the COC service area who have not attended COC but have had at least one member of their household attend. Research shows that 50% of all Santa Clarita households have at least one COC alumnus. Based on that research, it is estimated that there are over 88,000 prospects that could connect to the college through COC Foundation's Alumni and Friends program.

### SWOT Analysis

#### Strengths

- Easy to use forum for alumni to connect with each other and the college
- Relatively inexpensive to launch in relation to the long-term benefit
- Campaign is simple in its goal and clear in its plan
- Appeals to modern alumni as the portal mimics some aspects of social networking platforms already in existence
- One consolidated location for all COC campus programs to use as a hub for alumni information
- User-populated database, providing abundant information for college/alumni contacts
- Will help identify successful alumni who can serve as ambassadors for the college and increase our profile

#### Weaknesses

- There needs to be 'buy-in' for alumni to participate and use the portal
- Individual profile accuracy is dependent on user maintenance
- Initial reliance on the COC Information Technology department is high and this department is already stretched



- Year-long campaign requires coordinated efforts from virtually every department on an off campus to persistently drive the message
- May require part-time or full-time support in the long-run; could be self-funded

### Opportunities

- Provide a forum to communicate college events to our alumni and community
- Build a stronger, supportive and connected alumni network
- Provide a venue to solicit future partnerships and financial support for the college
- Increase the potential for stronger relationships between the college and the community
- Provide mentoring opportunities for alumni interested in supporting current student's academic pursuits
- Generate enthusiasm and pride among alumni such that they give back to the college in time, gifts, or monetary donations

### Threats

- Alumni not understanding the importance or benefits of the program
- Alumni preferring to engage their 4-year university alumni services instead of their 2-year college alumni services
- Inadequate institutional support – this must become almost a mantra for it to be successful
- Possible technical support needs such as re-setting user names and passwords

## **Competition**

Other social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn will compete for the online time of potential Cougar Network participants. However, the Cougar network will have the unique characteristic of being the only all-alumni portal to connect with former classmates and the college as a whole.

## **Strategy and Implementation**

The essence of the plan relies on simplicity and a coordinated approach that incorporates:

- Limited new content and functionality that approximates 100% reuse of, and connection to, existing COC website content, programs and communication channels
- Minimal, if any, additions to existing COC websites and programs
- Implementing a year-long sustained promotion period to jump-start the Cougar Network
- Creating easy access for the end user through the existing COC website



- Ensuring that every potential member of the Cougar Network can:
  - Voluntarily join the program
  - Opt-in to as many connection points and communication channels as they desire
  - Easily and quickly opt-out of connection points and communication channels as they desire

This Cougar Network database will be housed on the College of the Canyons server and will be accessed via the college website, specifically the Alumni portal on the COC home page. In the future it is envisioned that the college community can scrub and consolidate standalone contact lists reportedly held by departments, individual faculty and staff.

The database is self-populating by the interested alumni. Alumni can join the Cougar Network by creating a user name and password. They then have the option to provide information about themselves in two fields: Personal Information and College Activities. Alumni can also opt to subscribe to many existing college communication channels to stay keep abreast of activities and maintain connection to the college in a third field: College Connection. Individual participants in the Cougar Network can update their information and/or choices at any time.

See Attachment A for a screen shot of the web site Beta version of the Cougar Network registration site is shown on Attachment A.

The Personal Information field allows the alumnus to share much or little about themselves; only their name and email address are required to be displayed to the broad Cougar Network membership base. Alumni can choose to provide: home address, phone number(s), personal website, job title, and employer information. These subsequent contributions are able to be hidden from searches by other users. The Alumnus simply checks "hide" boxes next to features they do not want available to searchers, thus protecting their personal information but also making it available to the college for a variety of purposes.

The College Activities field allows the alumnus to identify the years they attended, the subject(s) they studied, and the activities they participated in while attending College of the Canyons. We anticipate this field will require some fine-tuning prior to the launch of the database. Every effort was made to be exhaustive in our list of college activities, but given the 41-year history of the college, undoubtedly some programs were missed. We anticipate this feature of the database will provide the College with direct marketing opportunities for College events and occasions.

Finally, the College Connection field allows alumni to choose to keep in touch with the





College by opting to receive one or more of the College's electronic publications. Publications include: the Monday Report, Breaking News, Chancellor's Update, Canyon Country Campus Newsletter, PAC Newsletter, Cougar News, and Bottom Line. These regular means of communication will promote Alumni awareness of campus activities and the role of the College in the greater community. Alumni will also be able to identify activities in which they might participate, volunteer, or support.

The beta version of the Alumni website can be accessed at the following link:  
<http://webdev/offices/Foundation/CougarAlum/Default.asp>

## Promotion Strategy

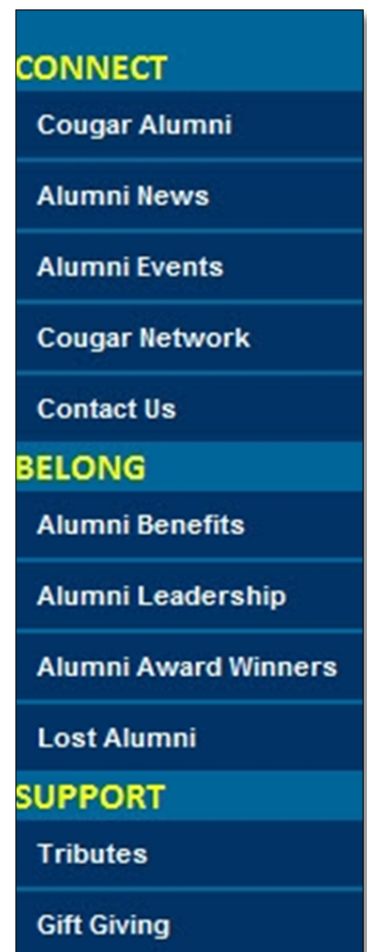
The immediate opportunity to reach our target audience lies in updating the existing Canyons.edu website with a link to a newly created "Alumni" section of the college web site. From there, our alumni can navigate to the various functional pages to connect, belong or support as shown in the link set from the beta version of the alumni web site home page.

Once the initial functionality is established, we can evaluate the financial return of:

- Creating a vanity URL unique to the Cougar network web site
- Adding additional and unique internal pages to increase the robustness of the alumni section of the college's web site
- Revenue generating promotional boxes/banners
- A link to the COC Foundation home page as well as the Alumni & Friends membership site

With an out-of-pocket investment of \$5,000 by the college or the Foundation, a year-long program to promote the Alumni site and the Cougar Network can be launched. This promotional effort will include outreach in:

- Email marketing using purchased and organic lists
- Social media: FaceBook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, et. al.
- Print advertising; piggy back on current PIO buys; consider proprietary print buys based on budget



- Public Relations programs: press releases and public outreach
- Special Events: alumni week, spring alumni fling, networking and promotional events
- Direct Mail-implement a direct mail program with the lists that will be consolidated from existing faculty and staff contact lists; using the data collected via the new database
- Signage, banners, posters, marquees
- Guerilla marketing-flyer distribution, chalk talk Cougar tracks around campus and stadium; research interceptions at games



## Financial Analysis

Item Description	Out-of-Pocket Costs	Allocated (Soft) Costs
<u>Launch Costs</u>		
Create Cougar Network Web site including data base		\$17,440
Link to Student Services smart app		Nominal
First year promotional materials and events	\$15,000	
On-Going Maintenance Costs	Nominal	Nominal
Revenue (CafePress, In-kind and cash donations)		
Year 1	\$1,500	
Year 2	\$5,000	
Year 3	\$10,000	
Year 4 and out	\$10,000	

Based on the summary financial information shown above, the ten-year internal rate of return on the project will be in excess of 21%.



## Management Summary

A COC Alumni support poses a large, mostly untapped, resource for College of the Canyons. For minimal out-of-pocket cost, the college has the opportunity to implement a robust, easy to maintain Alumni portion of the college web site. This alumni portal will provide a clear benefit to alumni and allow the college to attract alumni participation and engagement with the college. Only then will the college be able to begin tapping into the power of its large alumni base.

The Alumni portal can be implemented by a committee that is empowered to make decisions and execute those decisions within the budget assigned to the project. The committee will include representation from cross-functional disciplines and departments across the COC campus, i.e., different perspectives ensure that the project meets the needs of the wide audience targeted. The committee will be managed by two faculty, two staff, two administrators and one student, but will not exceed 10 individuals.

The committee will also require input from IT (Information Technology), MIS (Management Information Systems), Student Services, and PIO (Public Information Office). All parties will have a vested interest in this product going live error-free. These parties must hold the belief that the Alumni portal will provide a one-stop shop for all Alumni.

The LEAP team consisting of Cindy Biehahn, Carmen Dominguez, Suzanne Finne, Wendy Hassenpflug, Lisa Hooper and Joe Klocko, and mentored by Cathy Ritz and Michele Edmonson, will bring this Alumni portal to life by September 2012. Go-live date hinges on funding and approval from the District. Thereafter control, maintenance and expansion of the site and the Network should be assumed by the Foundation.



Attachment A  
College of the Canyons Alumni Home Page (Beta)



**CONNECT**

- Cougar Alumni
- Alumni News
- Alumni Events
- Cougar Network
- Contact Us

**BELONG**

- Alumni Benefits
- Alumni Leadership
- Alumni Award Winners
- Lost Alumni

**SUPPORT**

- Tributes
- Gift Giving
- Volunteer
- Mentor

*College of the Canyons  
Alumni Affairs & Development*

COLLEGE OF THE CANYONS  
  
ALUMNI

  
Connect

 Like us on Facebook

 Follow us on Twitter



## Attachment B Cougar Network Registration Site (Beta)

**CONNECT**

Cougar Alumni

Alumni News

Alumni Events

Cougar Network

Contact Us

**BELONG**

Alumni Benefits

Alumni Leadership

Alumni Award Winners

Lost Alumni

**SUPPORT**

Tributes

Gift Giving

Volunteer

Mentor

### Cougar Network Alumni Form

(\*Hide, not included in alumni search)

Name:

Name When Attended COC:

Home Street Address:  (hide)

City:  (hide)

State:  (hide)

Zip Code:  (hide)

Email Address:  (hide)

Years Attended:  (Hold the CTRL button to click more than one year)

Area of Study:

Degree or Certificate Awarded:

Personal Website:

Business Name:

Title:

Business Street Address:

Business City:

Business State:

Business Zip Code:

**Participated in (Click all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Alpha Gamma Sigma Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Cross Country	<input type="checkbox"/> Softball
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Student Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Golf	<input type="checkbox"/> Student Ambassadors
<input type="checkbox"/> Baseball	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Soccer	<input type="checkbox"/> Swim
<input type="checkbox"/> Biology Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Volleyball Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Track and Field
<input type="checkbox"/> Debate/Speech Team	<input type="checkbox"/> MESA	<input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball
<input type="checkbox"/> Dive	<input type="checkbox"/> Model United Nations	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Polo
<input type="checkbox"/> Field Studies	<input type="checkbox"/> Nursing	<input type="checkbox"/> Women's Cross Country
<input type="checkbox"/> Football	<input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Women's Basketball
<input type="checkbox"/> Hockey	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychology Club	<input type="checkbox"/> Women's Golf
<input type="checkbox"/> Honors Society	<input type="checkbox"/> SNAC	<input type="checkbox"/> Women's Soccer
<input type="checkbox"/> Men's Basketball		

**College Communication: (Please check all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Breaking News	<input type="checkbox"/> Monday Report	<input type="checkbox"/> Chancellor's Update
<input type="checkbox"/> CCC Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/> PAC Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/> Cougar News
<input type="checkbox"/> Bottom Line		

