IU Alumni Panel Six Month Outcomes
September 2013 Report

Our results

The panel continues to provide …

Extremely high participation/response rates. Of the 1,434 panelists that were part of our pilot panel, 1,211 (84%) of you agreed to continue for another year—thank you! Since then, over 80% completed two or more surveys. Overall panel response rates during this time period averaged 71% (compared to 10% for non-panel, random sample surveys conducted during the same time period).

High-quality, impassioned verbatim comments. Below are some representative comments that we received from you through recent surveys.

IU Language Preferences Survey (April):
“I am glad that you are even having this conversation. As a regional campus, I don't mind if you say IU or Indiana University, but if you say Indiana University Bloomington, I don't think that's reflective of everyone.”—Alum from Indiana

IU Alumni Panel Website Survey (May):
“I find the site very well laid out and exquisitely informative. I know more now about the panel than when I agreed to be on it! BTW, I greatly enjoyed the Starbucks gift. I love the crimson ‘man’ graphics, think they are humorous.”—Alum from Indiana

IUAA All for You! e-Newsletter Survey (June):
“I get a decent amount of emails from IU or IU related activities so they all kind of blend together after a certain point. I would try to make the content as interesting as possible. I would rather get an email with short stories or quick interesting facts than long articles.”—Alum from Illinois

Indiana University Alumni Magazine Survey (August):
“I enjoy the engaging content of the magazine. It is one of the absolute bonuses of alumni association membership. The fact that you are seeking such input tells me that you are well on your way to keeping this publication on an upward and ever-improving arc.”—Alum from Indiana

Opportunities to experiment. For example, we analyzed response patterns to identify the best times of day and days of the week to send panel invitations. Most panelists respond within two hours of a survey’s launch time. We were surprised to learn that Friday, 9 a.m. to noon (EST), is the winning time slot so far. There are nonetheless many pockets of opportunity throughout the week.
Specific outcomes and trends

In March, we asked for another year-long commitment from panelists. Between April and August 2013, we fielded the following surveys:

- IU Language Preferences Survey (April)
- IU Alumni Panel Website Survey (May)
- IUAA All for You! e-Newsletter Survey (June)
- Indiana University Alumni Magazine Survey (August)

Some of the initial findings and recommendations that came from your feedback are catalogued below. Please keep in mind that IU often continues to derive insights, and take actions, many months after surveys are completed!

April: Curious about which terms confound, confuse, or irritate alumni?

Our IU Language Preferences Survey confirmed many of our assumptions about how alumni use and think about IU-related terms. When you talk or write about us, you most often refer to us as “Indiana University” or “IU.” If you reside out of state, you’re more likely to refer to us as “Indiana.”

How do alumni choose what to call us? It depends on a combination of factors, including first and foremost, your audience’s familiarity with IU; second, the formality of the situation; third, whether or not you’re discussing sports; fourth, your geographical location; and fifth, what medium you’re using to talk about us.

What do our alumni mean when they personally use the term “IU?” While IUB grads typically use the IU acronym to refer to IUB, non-IUB grads use the term equally to mean either IUB or the multiple-campus system. When seeking employment, most of you claim an IU degree rather than a specific campus degree.

Thinking of using the term “alum?” It is often seen as more welcoming and friendly—a tone we want to reinforce in our alumni work. However, it is best reserved for informal but official IUAA conversations and communications. While it may be perfectly appropriate for our website, social media, or e-newsletters, it probably isn’t appropriate for formal letters or invitations. Only a quarter of our alumni believe the term is always appropriate in any situation.

Finally, there was a lot of confusion about the banner phrase “Philanthropy at Work” on new construction sites. The phrase is intended to be a nod toward donor generosity, but it doesn’t always have the meaning IU intends. While most alumni panelists seem to understand that donor dollars fund new infrastructure, others think we’re touting what IU gives back to the community. Some even think we’re constructing new buildings for our new philanthropy school.
These findings have been passed along to appropriate offices, including writers on our staff, to assist them in making decisions about how, when, and why to use IU-related terms and phrases.

**May: What do you think about the new Alumni Panel website?**

When we decided to make the panel an ongoing program, we promised to make some upgrades to benefit you. In May, we launched a website for housing panel expectations, frequently asked questions, survey outcomes, announcements, etc. The goal was to professionalize the panel and cut down on questions or confusion.

After launching the website, we asked you to evaluate it. We also inquired about interest in an unmoderated bulletin board like LinkedIn. The majority of you found the website helpful, but you didn’t particularly want to connect with each other through social media.

As a result of your feedback, we have decided not to pursue additional social media opportunities at this time. We do update the website regularly. For example, we posted ongoing reminders about the $5 Starbucks e-cards we sent your way in early July and when they would expire (August 15). The website hosts a lot of helpful information, so you may want to occasionally skim the FAQ or survey schedule sections.

Bookmark your go-to resource at: [http://alumni.indiana.edu/panel](http://alumni.indiana.edu/panel)

**June: Is the newly redesigned All for You! alumni e-Newsletter hitting its mark?**

In general, yes, but there’s always room for improvement.
The editorial team is in the process of reviewing the upcoming year’s content plan to accommodate these recommendations:

*Short and simple works.* Our alumni are busy juggling careers, families, and social activities. Continue to use bullet points and highly visual graphics to brand/differentiate IUAA and quickly tell readers the most interesting/compelling things happening at IU.

*Consider more motivational stories.* Descriptions of the newsletter are generally positive. The majority of alumni (62%) described the newsletter as “interesting,” but only 7% described it as “motivational.”

*Focus on strong alumni interests.* Ensure a wide variety of topics, prioritizing those that alumni say they care about most (notable alumni, major events, athletics, member benefits, and arts and entertainment).

*Conduct a similar survey again in 12 months.* The goal would be to improve upon baseline percentages, especially in the area of unaided awareness.

*Review and act on verbatim responses.* We received a wide variety of write-in suggestions for improving the content and organization of the newsletter. Identify those that fit IUAA’s mission and resources, and incorporate them into future issues. And, consider anonymously publishing some of the verbatims in the alumni magazine or on social media channels to reinforce that comments are heard and acted upon.

**August: How is our new alumni magazine faring: online and off-line?**

These findings are hot off the press!

Panelists were divided into two audiences: IUAA members and nonmembers. Members were asked about their recall of, and opinions about, the print and electronic publications. Nonmembers were only asked about the online magazine.

Here are some of the highlights from both audiences:

*Overall, the print magazine is resonating.* It has a high recall rate (76%) compared to the *All for You!* e-Newsletter (43%). Only 3% discard it without reading/skimming any part of it, and the most common descriptors of the magazine are “attractive,” “professional,” and “attention grabbing.”

*Alumni perceive the quality of writing to be strong.* This was as true for the Summer 2013 issue as for the entire year’s issues.
Some magazine sections fulfill their intended mission (i.e., pride, value, or connection) more than others. For example, “Exchange” inspires the greatest pride in IU alumni (73%), as well as the greatest number of alumni calling the section “one of my favorites” (53%). Alumni want to see/read more content like the stories in “Original.” And, “On the Horizon” was not a favorite, but more than half (57%) want to see/read more things like it.

No particular section seems to warrant a great deal less space. “Exchange” inspires the strongest reactions from alumni. While some members would like to give “Exchange” less space, other members call it a favorite section.

The most appealing cover featured Hoosier basketball. The five prominent “IU faces” cover was a distant second, but the remaining covers were close behind. The least preferred was an all-text cover featuring IU romances. Future testing with panelists may help the team determine which components of which covers resonate best/least.

Illustrations on the cover (e.g., Summer 2013) spur strong reactions. Some readers love them; others hate the “cartoony” look.

Some alumni feel a little left out. Although it’s important to feature successful alumni, it is just as important to include the “average alum who doesn’t have a ‘wow’ job or income.”

Awareness levels of the online magazine are fairly low. Once alumni get to the site, more than one-third would probably revisit again. The majority describes the site as professional, attractive, interesting, and intuitive.

Online options aren’t particularly appealing to most readers. Our alumni are pretty vocal about a preference for print. If you are going to go online, you need regular reminders to do so. You also expect an online experience that reinforces the print magazine’s layout. The print magazine’s headers (“Exchange,” “Original,” “Ahead,” etc.) may not be especially intuitive online, where readers expect to know what you’re getting before clicking a link.

Our alumni continue to have technical difficulties with online access. You don’t understand why a password is necessary, and you don’t want to go to the effort of using/remembering a password. While IUAA cannot do anything about the password requirement, it can repeatedly reinforce why passwords are required and how to quickly/easily get access.

Closing reminders

Once again, THANK YOU for your ongoing participation and valuable feedback!

Your next survey will arrive in mid-October. You can expect to receive surveys every other month.

As always, if you have suggestions for improving your panel experience, or if you no longer wish to participate, please contact us at iumrktg@indiana.edu.