Enhancing accreditation through alumni management: sharing experiences

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Abstract

The Pontifical Catholic University of Peru's (PUCP) School of Management strives for continuous improvement and excellence in education. As part of this commitment, the school is currently undergoing accreditation with EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development). The challenge addressed in this presentation is the effective integration of alumni Coordination in the accreditation process. The objective is to showcase alumni's vital role in meeting EFMD accreditation requirements and improving the overall quality of management education.

Stakeholders and participants involved in the initiative include alumni, faculty, and accreditation coordinators. The presentation will outline the strategies employed to engage alumni actively in the accreditation process. Methods include establishing communication channels, organising alumni feedback sessions, and integrating alumni perspectives into curriculum development. The approach involves collaborative activities and initiatives that leverage the expertise and experiences of alumni to enhance the school's academic offerings.

Concrete outcomes include increased alumni involvement, updated and relevant curriculum elements, and a stronger sense of community among stakeholders. Direct benefits are evident in the enriched learning experiences for current students, while indirect benefits extend to the school's reputation and alumni network. Examples of short and long-term impacts will be presented, showcasing how alumni coordination positively influences accreditation outcomes.

The presentation will conclude by sharing lessons learned from the experience, emphasising the importance of alumni engagement in accreditation processes. Insights into future implications for both practice and research will be discussed. The audience will be invited to share their ideas on additional activities to meet accreditation requirements, fostering a collaborative and innovative approach.

Keywords: alumni management; accreditation; alumni perspectives; alumni strategies

Background

The School of Management will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2024. Since 2015, the goal has been to accredit the speciality even though the university has already been certified by the International Institute for Quality Assurance (IAC-CINDA) since 2013. It was always the idea to accredit with an international and prestigious accreditor that could allow this relatively new School to improve its quality management system, accelerate the program's internationalisation process, increase teaching and student exchange, and conduct joint research with other universities. To meet these objectives, the School´s Council applied to be a member of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) network and was accepted in December 2015.

The EFMD was chosen because it is recognised as a prestigious and demanding accreditor that promotes high-quality education in management and administration through three transversal pillars: (a) internationalisation, (b) perspective and business connection, and (c) ethics, responsibility, and sustainability. The EFMD evaluation process is based on five standards: (a) institutional context, (b) program design, (c) program implementation and activities, (d) results and impact, and (e) quality assurance system. The EFMD is present in 90 countries and has 972 members, where the participation of the following universities in the world's top stands out:
- Stanford University, Graduate School of Business
- University of Oxford, Said Business School

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- University of Cambridge, Judge Business School
- University of Pennsylvania, the Wharton School
- University of London, Bayes Business School

Some of the essential benefits for accrediting with EFMD that the Council identified were:
For the alumni
- Recognition of the international quality of the speciality in front of employers.
- Ease of studying and working abroad through the peer-based network.
- Opportunities to participate in international projects, networking, and learning events.

For students
- It ensures that the curriculum meets international quality standards, is updated, and involves students in the business world.
- It allows you to receive global recognition, which contributes to your insertion into the work, academic and scientific world.

For teachers
- Be part of the largest community of management development professionals worldwide in academia and business.
- Promotes support, evaluation and improvement mechanisms for teachers.
- Promotes research and knowledge.

The next step was to choose, in consultation with the EFMD, the program that would best suit the School for its international accreditation. Due to the university's characteristics, with different schools offering specialities very similar to those provided by the School of Management, the EFMD recommended that the school accredit the programme, not the school itself. With that decision made, the next step was to begin the EFMD, which denotes the pre-eligibility process and assigns an advisor who supports the organisation during the process leading up to the formal application for eligibility. The School began this process in 2016, and by the end of 2017, alumni management was one of the significant issues to resolve before applying for eligibility. This is why, in 2018, the Alumni Management Office (AMO) at the School of Management was created to "establish active and systematic engagement with our graduates to contribute to their professional development and the strengthening of the Management Community". A full-time professor leads this office as a Coordinator and has an assistant working on the different initiatives. The Coordinator reports directly to the School of Management Dean. This initiative was denominated the AlumniGestion Network. Since 2018, PHD Paloma Martinez-Hague has been the Coordinator and has worked with management students, first with Araceli Luna, then Milagros Flores, Yazmin Yupanqui and since 2023, Jimena Torres.

Developing the foundation of the Alumni Management Office

An initial evaluation assessed alumni management needs by collecting information from its main stakeholders regarding the expectations of the alumni management work for the School of Management. First, the authorities of the School of Management were interviewed. The documentation related to EFMD alumni management was reviewed, and research was conducted on alumni management in other universities, initially in the region and then in internationally recognised universities. Also, research was conducted in other university schools to understand how the relationship with alumni was managed by the university as a whole. Finally, two focus groups were conducted with alumni to present the AMO and to gather their expectations and needs. Some key findings were:
- Lack of a centralised alumni system at the university.
- An independent alumni association existed but needed to be formally integrated.
- The School of Management desired active alumni involvement in accreditation and engagement activities.
- Alumni expressed interest in staying connected and contributing.

Based on these findings, the Alumni Management Office developed and implemented the following activities for 2018.

Building a Strong Foundation (Phase 1)
To establish strong connections with alumni, the AMO initiated by gathering existing university data and conducting focus groups to understand alumni demographics, interests, and preferences. This information gathering was then complemented by researching and evaluating software tools specifically designed for alumni data management and communication. Unfortunately, the tools identified were out of budget, so the decision was made to use a Google form as a survey tool to ask alumni to update their information and manage an Excel spreadsheet as a database. The data was stored on the Coordinator's Google Drive. To complement this rather basic tool, the School of Management was able to develop a university-type profile on Linkedin so their alumni and students could include it as education and use the filter the platform provides for former students (https://www.linkedin.com/school/gestionpucp/). Finally, establishing communication channels with alumni to create a foundation for ongoing engagement was identified as necessary, so a Facebook group was made, and mailing was also used.

Understanding Alumni Needs (Phase 2):
The first step was to conduct a comprehensive survey to collect data on alumni's updated information, demographics, interests, engagement levels, and satisfaction. The survey was then analysed to identify critical priorities for the alumni network for the following years. To understand the needs of the alumni, the team chose to work with the graduation coordinators of each class and organise meetings to gather insights.

Alumni transversal strategies

After laying the foundations for the Alumni Management Office´s work plan and the AlumniGestion Network, analysing the results of the first year of work and identifying the requirements of the accreditation process for alumni management, the AMO proposed four transversal strategies that are the foundation for complying with the accreditation process.

First and foremost, the most critical objective was and is still to maintain an up-to-date alumni database with complete and current information and implement a tracking system for them. By keeping alumni data current and easily accessible, the School authorities and professors can effectively engage alumni in several activities presented in Table 1. To achieve this objective, the AMO employs a two-pronged approach to data collection. Firstly, upon graduation of a new alumni cohort, the Graduation Office is consulted for existing data, including general information such as names, identification numbers, email addresses, and specialisations. This data is then incorporated into the database and supplemented by the "Alumni Update Survey" initiative. This quarterly survey gathers and updates a range of information, including new contact details (email addresses, phone numbers, LinkedIn profiles), employment information (organisation, sector, position, area, entrepreneurship), and professional development details (postgraduate level and specialisation programs). Additionally, an open-ended section allows for alumni feedback in three key areas: (1) evaluation of PUCP, the School of Management, and the curriculum; (2) exploration of alumni expectations regarding professional development, preferred management topics, and desired participation initiatives; and (3) assessment of satisfaction and engagement with Alumni services.

Information-gathering campaigns are conducted every quarter to ensure robust results. A rewards programme has been implemented to incentivise alumni participation in the survey, offering gift cards and the highly sought-after prize of full scholarships for specialisation and diploma programmes. Effective communication is achieved through email and a WhatsApp community. This combined approach guarantees that at least 75% of alumni data is up-to-date.

The second was a communication strategy to keep alumni informed, engaged, and connected to the AlumniGestion network, the School of Management and the university through the communication channels developed. Before

formally establishing the Alumni Management Office (AMO), the Coordinator maintained alumni engagement through Facebook, tracking their workplaces, countries of residence, and professional achievements. Consequently, the first communication channel employed was a closed Facebook group exclusively for the School´s alumni. In this one-way communication channel, where only the Coordinator could post, messages of interest were shared, including events and workshops, alumni benefits, and recommendations. This approach fostered strong interaction with alumni. However, in 2022, Facebook closed the group due to violations of its policies regarding using PUCP's image and logo. Despite appeals and proof of university authorisation, efforts to restore the group were unsuccessful.

Undeterred, the AMO reinforced two alternative communication channels: email and organised WhatsApp groups within a dedicated Alumni Community. Currently, email is used for global communication to all alumni email addresses. Additionally, the well-established Whatsapp Alumni Community facilitates more direct communication. This network features a one-way communication channel where at least three messages are sent per week: (1) "Monday Motivation" to maintain engagement, (2) "Employability Wednesdays" compiling weekly job openings, and (3) announcements of relevant events or workshops. Furthermore, postgraduate educational opportunities and internationalisation prospects are shared. It should be noted that every class since the first 2010 class has a Whatsapp group and a talent management specialised Whatsapp group congregating alumni in HR positions and professors.

The third transversal strategy is to track alumni participation through a system that identifies alumni engagement in the AlumniGestion network activities. The previously described database has been expanded to include a dedicated section for tracking alumni engagement. This section encompasses invitations to the School's courses, involvement in the School's content generation, invitations to events and workshops as speakers, and other initiatives to be detailed later. Various activities have been implemented to ensure effective tracking, though not all have proven functional.

One of the most direct and valuable methods involves immediate registration upon the occurrence of an activity. For instance, when the AlumniGestion Network hosts an event, the AMO automatically logs alumni participation in the database, whether as speakers or attendees. However, there are other activities where the AMO is not necessarily the organiser, such as class invitations. While the AMO provides the database to professors to encourage course invitations, professors sometimes need to communicate whether or not they have extended invitations. For this, an Excel spreadsheet has been created for registration, and a reminder is sent every three weeks highlighting the importance of tracking. Additionally, LinkedIn has been identified as a valuable network for tracking additional alumni activities.

One strategy employed to increase engagement is word-of-mouth promotion. The "Invite Your Friend" campaign is conducted twice a year, disseminating videos showcasing the benefits of belonging to the AlumniGestion Network. This encourages alumni to invite their former classmates to join the Alumni Community. Similarly, identifying cohorts with lower engagement and inviting representative alumni to participate in activities has proven effective. Once the initiative has been completed, such as recording an interview or a promotional video, the participant shares it, naturally generating visibility among former classmates. Another strategy is the involvement of AMO in the graduation ceremony; even though it is the university, through their events office, that organises the graduations for all schools, the AMO team participates in the organising meetings with the soon-to-be graduates both in person and online, providing an excellent opportunity to include them into the Whatsapp class group and Community. Before the graduation ceremony, AMO hires a photographer, offers photos to the graduates and asks them to fill out the "Alumni Update Survey".

Finally, having a professor lead the AMO brought the idea of developing research regarding alumni management. Since 2021, Professor Paloma Martinez - Hague together with professors Milos Lau and Andres Macarachvili, designed a study with the School of Management´s alumni, applying theoretical models of the University - Alumni relationship and have had the opportunity to share their results in multiple academic congresses such as the VI and VII ICAReAlumni conferences in 2022 and 2023; the XXIX International

Conference on Learning in 2022; the 16th annual International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies (ICERI) and the XII CIDU (Ibero-American Congress of University Teaching) in 2022.

Alumni Initiatives for Accreditation

The next step was to align our activities with the accreditation process's requirements for alumni management. This involved organising the requirements into the topics measured by the accreditation process, presented in Table 1. Table 1 presents each topic and the different activities the AMO has implemented since 2019. As of May 2024, we are finalising our preparation for the first audit of the School of Management´s Self-Assessment Report (SAR), the first step in the final accreditation process. Appendix 1 presents the questions that guide our analysis and report on each topic.

Table 1

Topic	Initiative
Educational contributions of alumni	Direct coordination with the area in charge of selecting professors and teaching assistants to share with the alumni the vacancies each semester. We send the call for applications first to the alumni before it goes out externally.
	We have created "Vitamins for Employability," where, together with the Academic Director and the Coordinator of Relations with Organizations, we organise presentations with companies about job opportunities and always invite an alumni who works there.
	The AMO coordinates directly and closely with student organisations to provide them with alumni contacts for their various student academic activities.
	The university's Admissions Office includes alumni in its communication campaigns through photos and videos and invites them to give presentations to prospective students and their parents. They also invite our alumni to their Comienza PUCP program to attract school students to the university.
	As AMO, we coordinate closely with the Student Affairs Office to ensure that our alumni are involved as mentors in the university´s mentoring program, Mentoring PUCP.
	Constant coordination with Management professors to invite alumni to their course sessions.
	We organise employability workshops with alumni, where our presenters share tips for job placement and career development.
	Alumni share with the AMO team job opportunities for other alumni and internships for management students.
	The AMO shares information about the school's research groups to encourage alumni participation, most of which include alumni.
	The School of Management has an Advisory Board composed of professionals from essential organisations in Peru, including two alumni with outstanding professional careers.
	The School of Management has a full-time professor who coordinates the internships required for students before graduation and has a coordinator in charge of relations with organisations in Peru to develop projects and internship opportunities.
	The School of Management invites alumni to participate in focus groups and interviews to evaluate the curricula and include their observations in the proposed modifications.
	The AMO supports alumni's integration into programs and activities organised by the university through the Employability Office, offers a job board, employability orientation, employability fairs,

		resume review and improvement services, and employability workshops.
Graduate quality		The AMO tracks graduate satisfaction in two ways. - Through the School of Management Tracking System led by the university´s Office of Academic Affairs, the AMO monitors the quality of alumni through Employer Surveys, which show that 98% of employers are satisfied or completely satisfied with the graduates, indicating that they have adequately developed the generic competencies (autonomous learning and adaptability; ethics, citizenship and environmental awareness; research, creation and innovation; critical thinking; collaborative skills; effective communication: oral, written and non-verbal) and the specific competencies (strategic management, project management, financial management, people management, process management and marketing) of the program. According to these studies carried out 2 and 5 years after graduation, 90% of alumni work in positions related to their studies. However, 85% were perceived as over-educated. - Internally, the Alumni Update Survey has a feedback section on the curriculum and the School of Management. The AMO shares these comments to be considered and incorporated by the School of Management.
		The AMO monitors: - The organisations and sectors in which alumni work. The private sector (81%) is the primary source of employment among alumni of this school. Also, 7% are employed in private non-profit organisations, 6% work in the public sector and 5% are self-employed. - The roles and positions of alumni. The leading roles are Analyst (442), Assistant (281), Coordinator (143), Executive (70), Specialist (137), Manager (120), Chief (120) and Supervisor (51). Remember that the school is only 20 years old, so the first class graduated in 2010. - Alumni working abroad. Currently, 88 of the 3319 alumni are working in Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Panama, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.
		Despite having access to all this information for the specific feedback of local and international employers regarding the graduates' professional performance, it has been necessary to hire consulting services to conduct market research with current and potential employers.
Alumni services		The AMO uses a database of at least 75% up-to-date contact and professional information. We follow up on the careers of our alumni through the Alumni Update Survey. This survey is conducted four times a year to collect information such as contact information, graduation information (year of graduation, mention), country of residence, position and organisation in which they work. Additional data is collected through the visualisation of LinkedIn profiles. Raffles are organised to keep the database updated to encourage graduates to provide or update their information. In them, full scholarships and diplomas are offered to the School of Management's Continuing Education programs.
		Constant communication is achieved through various channels: - Comunidad AlumniGestión PUCP is in WhatsApp, which integrates all alumni and is used to share news, events, and job opportunities immediately. - Specific WhatsApp groups for each graduating class and topics of interest, such as human resources management. - Email plays a vital role in communicating news related to the School and the university. One very appreciated example is the weekly newsletter "Employability Wednesday" AMO shares, which compiles job opportunities (1) shared by other alumni and (2) sought by the AMO team. -Social networks like LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook are also employed to keep alumni informed about events and news from the School and the university.
		About professional development: - The AMO organises professional development workshops and webinars for alumni based on their interests, as the Alumni Update Survey informs them. Alumni Management Talks are organised in which alumni share their professional and academic experiences and main achievements with other alumni. - The AMO works directly with the Continuing Education office in the School of Management to

	design and offer courses, programs, and diplomas that are of interest to and necessary for alumni. - Alumni also participate in the university´s Mentoring program, where they advise Management students. They also participate as speakers in Employability Vitamins and various workshops for students. - The School, through AMO, works to position its alumni's personal brand by sharing digital content on its various social media platforms, such as interviews as Gestores en la Cancha (videos and notes) and presenting their ventures (Gestor Emprende). - The AMO follows up through the Management Alumni Tracking System reports. The results indicate that 94% of the alumni are currently working.
	Networking opportunities: - The AMO conducts face-to-face professional development workshops where there is always a networking space during the Coffee Break. The AMO organises content creation sessions (videos for the School of Management or interviews for Gestores en la Cancha), which also serve as a space for alumni reunions and networking.
	Financial resources: - The School of Management provides financial resources for the AMO to meet its objectives and for the AlumniGestión Network to continue growing. With the funds, it has been possible to hold on-site and virtual events and provide discounts and scholarships for programs from the Continuing Education office. In addition, funds have been committed to promote the international development of alumni. For example, last year, it supported a couple of alumni in presenting their papers at an international congress in England. - The AMO lacks a fundraising and donation structure. Recently, however, the AMO team has connected students with some alumni entrepreneurs so they could become sponsors of the university sports competition, which supports the School´s teams.

Conclusion

Integrating alumni management into the accreditation process at PUCP's School of Management has been transformative. Establishing the Alumni Management Office (AMO) and developing the AlumniGestion Network have successfully engaged our alumni. We've leveraged their experiences and insights to enhance our academic offerings and meet EFMD accreditation requirements.

Some of the most relevant lessons from this initiative include the critical importance of maintaining an up-to-date alumni database, the effectiveness of multi-channel communication strategies, and the value of tracking and measuring alumni participation in various activities. These initiatives led to an important alumni involvement, exciting learning experiences for our students and a stronger sense of community.

Moving forward, we plan to further refine our alumni engagement strategies by exploring new technologies for data management, expanding our alumni services, and fostering greater collaboration with international partners.

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Appendix 1

- Educational contributions of professionals (alumni)
  - How are professionals integrated into the program's teaching?
    - Do they lead courses or workshops for students?
    - Do they mentor current or prospective students?
    - Do they advise students on their work?
    - Do they share their professional experiences with students?
    - Do they offer internships or other practical experience opportunities?
    - Do they lead projects or research?
  - What management/advisory structures are in place?
    - Is there an advisory committee composed of professionals?
    - Is there a coordinator of internships or professional relations?
    - Are there professional development opportunities for professionals involved in the program?
  - To what extent are alumni of the program involved?   How many alumni participate in the program?
    - In what activities do they participate?
    - Do they participate in the design and development of the program?
- Graduate quality
  - Does the quality of graduates meet the program's objectives?
    - Have graduates developed the skills and knowledge expected in the program?
    - Are graduates able to apply their knowledge and skills in the workplace?
    - Do graduates advance in their professional careers?
    - Are graduates satisfied with their preparation for the workplace?
  - Do graduates' jobs (including professional progression) match the target profile?
    - Do graduates get jobs in the program's field of study?
    - Do graduates get jobs at an appropriate level?
  - Who are the leading employers of graduates, and in what positions?
    - What types of companies do graduates work for?
    - What positions do graduates hold?
    - How does the program evaluate employer satisfaction with graduates?
  - Does the institution evaluate the satisfaction of the program's external stakeholders?
    - Are surveys or interviews conducted with program graduates?
    - Are surveys or interviews conducted with other external stakeholders (e.g., professional associations)?
  - What evidence is there of the employability of graduates at the international level?
    - How many graduates get jobs abroad?
    - In which countries do graduates work?
    - How does the program evaluate the satisfaction of international employers with graduates?
  - Does the institution evaluate students' and graduates' satisfaction with the input they receive from their interactions with the world of practice?
    - What career services does the program offer (counselling, job search, workshops, etc.)?
- Alumni Services
  - How are the program's alumni services organised?
    - Is there an alumni association or other alumni network?
    - What is the structure and governance of the alumni association?
  - What alumni services are available to graduates? Are they appropriate? What is the acceptance or use of these services?
    - Networking opportunities (e.g., events, online directories)

- Career development services (e.g., mentoring, job search assistance)
- Educational and professional development opportunities (e.g., workshops, conferences)
- Social and recreational activities (e.g., events, volunteer opportunities)
- Does the institution support alumni services?
  - Does the institution provide financial or other resources to the alumni association?
  - Does the institution promote alumni services to graduates?
- How do alumni actively participate in the activities of the institution/program, and in what ways (program promotion, teaching sessions, project work, graduate recruitment, etc.)?
  - Do alumni serve on advisory boards or committees?
  - Do alumni volunteer to teach or mentor students?
  - Do alumni participate in recruiting events or career fairs?
  - Do alumni donate to the program or institution?
- How are alumni relations managed at the program and institution level?
  - What are the communication channels used to reach alumni?
  - How are alumni data collected and managed?
- Are alumni involved in advisory boards or fundraising committees for the program/institution?
  - Do alumni serve on the institution's board of directors?
  - Do alumni make donations to the program or institution?
- Are there ongoing professional development services for alumni?
  - Does the program or institution offer workshops, conferences, or other professional development opportunities for alumni?
  - Are there online resources or networking opportunities available to alumni?
  - Does the program or institution provide financial support for alumni to attend professional development events?
- What evidence is there that graduates are highly sought after by recruiting organisations at the national and international levels?
  - What is the placement rate of graduates?
  - What are the career paths of graduates?
  - What are the opinions of employers about graduates?