BAD at RETIRING,
They may no longer keep office hours, but retired faculty members are working hard to raise funds and engage alumni

GOOD at GIVING

By REGINALD STUART

Officially, Jill Claster retired from the teaching and leadership ranks at New York University in 2003. But the medieval history scholar is still around, frequently lecturing on international alumni trips, talking to prospective students about the value of an NYU education, and raising money for scholarships.

Advancement leaders are thrilled with Claster’s continued involvement. She is among a small but well-regarded group of university retirees across the country who are, well, bad at retiring. Their ranks are likely to increase in the coming years as more baby boomers reach regular retirement age and ponder, “What’s next?” More than 50 percent of faculty members at most U.S. institutions are or will be at least 55 years old within the next 10 years, according to the American Council on Education.

The coming wave of retirements could be good news for advancement as former faculty and staff members still dedicated to their institutional missions continue working as university ambassadors.
FACULTY FUNDRAISER EMERITUS: The relationships that dean Bernard Fogel maintained with donors in the 15 years after he retired from the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine continue to pay off for the institution, most recently with a nearly $5 million gift. "He is just exceptional; he has fundraising in his blood," says Marsha Hegley, the medical school's associate vice president of advancement.
“My love affair with NYU began when I was a freshman. I've just had a great run,” says Claster, the first female dean of the institution's College of Arts and Sciences. “I'm devoted to this university and very happy to be involved.”

Although she raises money, Claster stresses that retirees aren't rainmakers. Instead, many bring a certain intangible value to advancement efforts. She sees her role as simply sharing her feeling that NYU was a good place to study and work—and still is. In the process, such as when she speaks at alumni events, she hopes her messages can sustain goodwill for the institution and inspire financial support.

THE INSIDERS

“Retired faculty can be a wonderful resource,” says Debbie Harmon Ferry, director of alumni and parent relations at Linfield College, a small, private liberal arts college in Oregon. “They have a long history with the institution. For many alumni, their names invoke wonderful memories.”

Still, retired faculty members are a largely untapped source for supporting advancement efforts. Institutions often commemorate the retirement of a popular or a longtime faculty member by engaging alumni who return to celebrate an adored professor and who will hopefully stay involved with their alma mater afterward. Or institutions tap retirees for annual gifts or target them for planned gifts. That limited engagement with retiring faculty and staff is shortsighted, say retirees and advancement officers.

Retirees network with each other, current faculty, alumni, and donors. Some call donors and write appeal and thank you letters.

Their participation at alumni events, akin to attending a family reunion, helps the institution maintain long-term relationships with key constituents.

Linfield, for example, flies Dave Hansen, a retired dean of students, around the country to speak at many of its parent and alumni receptions and dinners.

“His name is well-known across the decades,” says Ferry of the dean, who draws dozens of attendees to events. With humorous tales about memorable students and occasions drawn from his 40 years at the college, Hansen stirs alumni nostalgia and warm feelings for the institution. Parents and alumni leave feeling that Linfield is an institution worthy of their support.

Brian Perillo, associate vice president of alumni relations at NYU, sums up the valuable role of retired faculty this way: “It's all about maintaining the relationship.” At an institution with 470,000 alumni, involving retirees in advancement efforts is “extremely important because so many alumni have connections to faculty members.”

For retirees, helping their former employers is a residual benefit of staying connected. Victor Webb, who retired in 2008 after 20 years as a journalism adjunct, helps the University of Southern California raise scholarship money—which also helps him maintain relationships with former co-workers. A member of USC’s Retired Faculty Association, Webb co-chairs a scholarship fund for students from low-income neighborhoods surrounding the Los Angeles university.

Each year Webb writes to fellow retirees soliciting contributions for the Russell Caldwell Neighborhood Scholarship Program, which is supporting 11 students this academic year with renewable scholarships of $3,000. Webb and his cohorts also mentor the scholarship recipients and attend annual stewardship luncheons for the students and donors.

“It's a lot of work keeping up with these students,” he says. “I'm trying to maintain some contact with the university and some contact with other retirees. I want to keep the connections I've [made].”

Former University of Miami Miller School of Medicine dean Bernard Fogel couldn't imagine not being involved. Although he officially left his post in 1995, he didn't really retire until December 2013 when he moved to Washington, D.C., to be near his grandchildren.

Two deans and nearly two decades after his retirement, university development officials cite recent gifts that are directly linked to the ties that Fogel built during his 40-plus years at his alma mater. Before leaving UM, Fogel helped close a nearly $5 million gift to the university.

Fogel kept close to a full-time schedule in his post-retirement years, personally visiting the donors that
he recruited or whose families he got to know when he led UM’s Miller School.

“He is a wonderful example of how you keep those important relationships,” says Marsha Kegley, associate vice president of advancement at the medical school. “You just can’t replace those years and years of relationships. He talks with donors [and] knows their families.”

Even though he’s hundreds of miles away, Fogel sounds as ready to pitch in and help his institution as when he started his career. “I’m going to keep my hands on the school of medicine by virtue of my relationship with it.”

FIND THE RIGHT FIT
Although gathering interest, the idea of retired faculty and staff playing significant roles in an institution’s overall development and advancement efforts is relatively new. As fundraising becomes more professionalized and expectations of major gifts soar, development offices need to be careful when recruiting retired faculty for fundraising, says Michael Morsberger, vice president for development and alumni relations at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

“This is not for amateurs,” Morsberger says. “We need volunteers, make no mistake, and for administration, faculty, and alumni to join hands with us. It takes a village. But our advancement offices are being held to a very high standard when it comes to performance.

“You need to make sure they are on board with new leadership, new plans, and a new vision for the future,” Morsberger adds. “While we in advancement spend a lot of time getting our alums to revisit their past, their fond memories of alma mater—in which retired faculty and staff could be helpful—we are simultaneously asking alumni to invest in the future. Herein lies the tricky part.”

Retirees can advance their institutions without fundraising, says Janette Brown, executive director of the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education, a service group located on more than 100 U.S. college campuses. The organization encourages retired faculty and staff members to spend some of their free time volunteering at their institutions. Brown notes that at USC, where she heads the Emeriti Center, retirees spearheaded advocacy efforts to have the university install hearing loop technology, which allows the hearing impaired to better hear lectures, performances, and other campus events.

At one institution, a team of retirees takes tickets and ushers at the university’s four commencement ceremonies every year. While those tasks may seem minor, having volunteers attend to them frees paid staff to focus on other assignments.

Whether retirees help with advancement efforts or other institutional needs, the best way to get them involved is to cultivate relationships the way you would with donors. “Find out what retired faculty [members] do and care about. By developing the relationship, that’s when you will figure out how they can help you with your fundraising,” Brown says.

Matching retiree interests, personalities, and skills with the various tasks that need to be done is important. Some retirees are excellent fundraisers while others may be more enthusiastic about mentoring, tutoring, or lecturing.

Keep in regular contact with retirees through a retiree organization or an office on campus. Some retirees already have occasional group lunches or gatherings, yet no organ exists to harness their interests and help beyond retirement, except on a case-by-case basis. An ongoing effort to maintain rapport assures extra help is there when you need it most.

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