



# The Role of Alumni Units in Building Professional Networks for Alumni

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## Abstract

Universities are responsible not only for producing academically competent graduates but also for preparing alumni to adapt and compete in the workplace through the development of professional networks. In this context, the alumni unit plays a strategic role as a liaison between alumni, the institution, and the industrial world. This study aims to analyze the role of the alumni unit in building professional networks for alumni, identify obstacles faced, and examine efforts made to overcome these obstacles. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach with the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University as the research object. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation during internships, then analyzed descriptively to obtain an in-depth overview of alumni management. The results show that the Alumni Unit plays a role as a communication liaison between alumni and the university, a provider of career information, and a facilitator in the development of professional networks through alumni database management programs, tracer studies, seminars, webinars, and other alumni activities. The main obstacles faced include low alumni participation, alumni data that is not always up-to-date, and the wide distribution of alumni. This study concludes that the role of the alumni unit has been running well, but digital technology-based program innovation and more adaptive management strategies are needed to increase the effectiveness of the development of the alumni professional network in a sustainable manner.

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## 1. Introduction

The transformation of higher education in the era of globalization and digitalization has shifted the paradigm of higher education management from merely an educational institution to an organization that is required to build a sustainable ecosystem between students, graduates, the industrial world, and society. In this context, alumni are no longer viewed as the final output of the educational process, but rather as strategic assets that make important contributions to institutional development, enhancing the university's reputation, strengthening professional networks, and creating opportunities for collaboration between the university and the workplace. Globally, various universities have begun to position alumni management as an integral part of their institutional

strategy because alumni play a role in expanding professional connections, increasing graduate employability, and strengthening loyalty to the educational institution. (Baumann & Halpern, 2024). Study Baumann & Halpern (2024) shows that the quality of alumni association services significantly influences alumni satisfaction and their loyalty to the institution, so universities need to build a structured and sustainable alumni management system.

The increasingly competitive global workplace landscape is also driving universities to prepare graduates not only through academic competencies but also through access to professional networks that can accelerate graduates' transition into the job market. From the perspective of Social Capital Theory developed by Bourdieu and Coleman, social networks are a form of social capital that provides individuals with access to resources, information, and economic opportunities that can increase professional mobility. In the context of higher education, alumni networks are a form of social capital that can help graduates gain access to jobs, professional mentoring, collaboration opportunities, and sustainable career development. Research Kumari (2024) emphasized that the alumni network has a significant role in helping the career growth of students and graduates through the transfer of experience, mentoring, and expanding access to information on the world of work.

In Indonesia, attention to alumni management has increased with the development of tracer study policies mandated by universities as a tool for evaluating graduate quality and the relevance of education to industry needs. However, the implementation of alumni management at many universities still tends to focus on collecting administrative alumni data and conducting tracer studies, while alumni's strategic role as a driver of professional networks has not been fully utilized. Hamid et al (2021) explained that the development of a digital-based alumni information system is an urgent need for universities to manage alumni data more effectively and provide fast and integrated access to career information. The development of this system demonstrates that digitizing alumni management is a crucial foundation for strengthening the relationship between universities and their alumni.

Studies on the role of alumni in the development of educational institutions also show that alumni have multidimensional contributions. Husna et al (2022) found that alumni can contribute to the development of educational curricula through the professional experiences they gain after entering the workforce. This finding demonstrates that alumni are not only beneficiaries of education but also important stakeholders capable of providing feedback on improving the institution's academic quality. In line with this, Rahman (2021) emphasized that alumni empowerment management is an important element in maintaining long-term relationships between alumni and universities, especially in building sustainable contributions to the development of educational institutions.

On the other hand, developments in information technology are driving changes in alumni management models from conventional approaches to more interactive digital systems. Sumandito et al (2026) explained that an integrated alumni network information system can support the implementation of tracer studies while also serving as a means of disseminating career information and developing alumni professional relationships. These findings demonstrate that the function of alumni units in higher education has evolved from merely managing administrative data to facilitating career development and professional connectivity for alumni. This change demonstrates a conceptual evolution in alumni management, where alumni engagement is now viewed as an institutional strategy to enhance graduate competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy.

However, previous research has shown differences in focus. Some studies have focused more on the technical aspects of alumni information system development and tracer studies as institutional evaluation instruments. (Hamid et al., 2021; Sumandito et al., 2026), while other studies place more emphasis on alumni contributions to academic development and institutional governance. (Husna et al., 2022; Rahman, 2021) These studies have not yet thoroughly examined how alumni units organizationally carry out strategic functions in building professional alumni networks as part of post-graduation career development. This gap indicates that studies on alumni management are still dominated by an administrative perspective rather than a professional networking development perspective.

Empirically, alumni management challenges remain a problem in many higher education institutions, particularly related to low alumni participation, limited alumni database updates, and weak ongoing interaction between alumni and the institution. Recent research on digital alumni engagement shows that higher education institutions across the world face similar challenges in maintaining alumni engagement after graduation, primarily due to limited communication systems and the wide geographical distribution of alumni. (Sharma et al., 2026). Another study by Rista et al (2024) shows that digitizing alumni management is a strategic solution to increase communication effectiveness, accelerate the distribution of career information, and expand relations between universities and the industrial world through alumni networks.

In the context of this research, Bina Darma University, as a private university with an information technology-based development orientation, has established an Alumni Unit as part of the Career, Alumni, and Student Development Unit. Based on field studies in the research document, the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit carries out various strategic functions including managing alumni databases, conducting tracer studies, disseminating job vacancy information, organizing alumni seminars and webinars, and developing digital communication between alumni and the university. However, in its implementation, various obstacles are still encountered, such as low alumni participation in campus activities, alumni data that is not always updated, and the wide distribution of alumni that complicates program coordination.

This research is novel compared to previous studies because it not only examines alumni as tracer study objects or institutional stakeholders, but also specifically analyzes how alumni units, as internal organizational structures of higher education institutions, carry out strategic functions in building alumni professional networks. This approach is important because alumni's success in building professional connections depends not only on individual qualities but is also influenced by institutional systems that facilitate access to job opportunities, information exchange, mentoring, and professional collaboration. Thus, this research broadens the perspective of alumni management studies from an administrative aspect to a strategic approach based on the development of alumni social capital.

Based on the description, this study aims to analyze the role of the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit in building professional networks for alumni, identify programs that support the development of professional networks, and analyze the obstacles and efforts made in increasing the effectiveness of the relationship between alumni and the university. The results of the study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of higher education management studies and provide practical recommendations for universities in designing alumni management strategies that are more adaptive, sustainable, and relevant to the dynamics of the modern workplace.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the Alumni Unit in building professional networks for alumni at Bina Darma University. The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because this study focuses on the exploration of social and organizational phenomena in a contextual manner, particularly related to alumni management, professional relationship development, and institutional strategies in maintaining alumni connections with the university. According to Baumann & Halpern (2024), studies on alumni engagement in higher education institutions require an approach capable of capturing the dynamics of the relationship between alumni, the institution, and the strategic values formed from these interactions. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand empirical reality more comprehensively than quantitative measurements alone, especially when the research object relates to managerial processes and social interactions within the higher education environment.

The research used a case study with a focus on the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University as an institutional unit responsible for managing alumni relations, implementing tracer studies, distributing career information, and developing alumni professional networks. The case study method was chosen because this research seeks to understand specific phenomena within a particular

organizational context so as to produce an in-depth empirical picture of the implementation of alumni programs at the university level. Rahman (2021) explains that alumni management is part of a university's strategic management, not only serving to maintain relationships with graduates but also playing a role in empowering alumni as long-term institutional assets. More broadly, Kumari (2024) emphasized that alumni networks in higher education have a significant influence on the career development of graduates, so an in-depth analysis is needed regarding how institutions facilitate the formation of these networks.

The research subjects consisted of informants purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the management of the alumni program at Bina Darma University. The informants included the Head of the Career, Alumni, and Student Development Unit, Alumni Unit staff, and Bina Darma University alumni who actively interact with the university's alumni program. The purposive sampling technique was used because the research required informants with direct experience in the alumni management process and the implementation of professional network development programs. Husna et al (2022) explains that alumni are strategic stakeholders in the higher education system because their involvement not only contributes to curriculum development, but also becomes an important part in evaluating the quality of education and the sustainability of the institution's relationship with graduates.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation during the research at the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University. Observations were conducted to understand the operational activities of the alumni unit in implementing alumni database management programs, implementing tracer studies, distributing career information, seminars, webinars, and other alumni activities. Interviews were conducted directly with key informants to obtain data on the role of the alumni unit, operational constraints, and strategies for developing alumni professional relationships. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through institutional documents, internal reports of the alumni unit, alumni activity archives, and scientific literature relevant to alumni management in higher education. Hamid et al (2021) emphasized that the alumni information system is a crucial data source in supporting the effectiveness of alumni management and the distribution of digital technology-based career information. A similar sentiment was also expressed by Sumandito et al (2026) which explains that alumni database integration serves as a foundation for implementing tracer studies and developing sustainable alumni communication.

Technique Data collection was conducted through three main procedures: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to obtain an empirical picture of the implementation of the alumni program directly in the work environment of the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants to explore perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the alumni program, institutional challenges, and the alumni unit's contribution to building professional relationships among alumni. Documentation was used to supplement the data in the form of tracer study reports, alumni databases, alumni seminar archives, and digital communication media used by the institution. Sharma et al (2026) explains that the development of technological innovation in alumni management has changed the alumni interaction model to be more digital, so that observation of digital communication media has become an important part of the study of modern alumni management. Rista et al (2024) also emphasized that the digitalization of alumni relations is a strategic factor in expanding the effectiveness of communication between universities and their alumni.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and systematic conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, all observations, interviews, and documentation were selected based on their relevance to the research focus on the role of alumni units in building professional networks. The data presentation stage was carried out by organizing information into thematic categories such as communication functions, providing career information, alumni database management, tracer studies, alumni seminars, and obstacles in program implementation. The final stage, drawing conclusions, was carried out by

interpreting the relationships between categories to produce a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the alumni unit's role in developing professional networks. According to Salabi et al (2024), tracer study data analyzed systematically can make a significant contribution to the evaluation of study programs and the development of strategies for higher education institutions. In addition, Yumen (2024) shows that the use of digital platform-based alumni data analysis is increasingly important in understanding alumni relationship patterns and optimizing alumni engagement strategies.

To increase data validity, the study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from unit heads, alumni unit staff, and alumni as users of alumni services. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to obtain consistency in empirical data. The use of triangulation in qualitative research is crucial to ensure that the interpretation of research results has a high level of credibility and is able to describe empirical conditions objectively. In research on alumni management, data validity is a crucial element because the success of the analysis depends heavily on the accuracy of information regarding alumni relations, data management systems, and the effectiveness of institutional programs implemented by the university. (Baumann & Halpern, 2024).

Through this methodological design, this research is expected to be able to produce a comprehensive understanding of how the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University carries out its strategic function in building a professional alumni network, identifying obstacles faced in implementing alumni programs, and formulating an empirical picture of the effectiveness of alumni management as part of the development of higher education institutions in the digital era.

### 3. Results And Discussions

This study aims to analyze in depth how the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University carries out its institutional role in building a professional network for alumni as part of a strategy for managing sustainable relationships between the university and its graduates. Based on the results of observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation conducted during the study, it was found that the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University not only carries out administrative functions as an alumni data manager, but has also developed into a strategic unit that contributes to building professional connectivity, distributing career information, strengthening institutional communication, and facilitating alumni relationships with the world of work. These findings show that alumni management in modern higher education has undergone a transformation from a conventional administrative function to an institutional relationship management model oriented towards building long-term social capital.

Results Research shows that the primary role of the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit is as a communication liaison between alumni and the institution. Based on field data, the alumni unit actively maintains communication with alumni through various digital media, including alumni communication groups, institutional social media, the dissemination of university activity information, and the publication of academic and non-academic agendas that still involve alumni. This ongoing communication creates an institutional relationship that allows alumni to continue to feel part of the university ecosystem even after completing their studies. From an institutional relationship management perspective, ongoing communication is the main foundation in maintaining alumni loyalty and building long-term emotional attachment to the educational institution. Baumann & Halpern (2024) explains that the quality of relationships built through the alumni association significantly influences alumni's perceptions of the institutional value they receive after graduation. This research finding supports this argument, as the success of the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit in maintaining ongoing communication has proven to be the foundation for broader professional relationships between alumni and the university.

Role The second finding in this study relates to the Alumni Unit's role as a provider of career information for alumni. Interviews with alumni unit managers and alumni as service users revealed that the university actively distributes information on job vacancies, competency development

training, professional certification opportunities, and recruitment activities from external partners collaborating with the university. This program directly demonstrates that the Alumni Unit has taken on the role of career development facilitator, not merely an alumni data administrator. In the context of contemporary higher education, an institution's ability to provide access to information on the world of work is a crucial part of efforts to increase graduate employability. Kumari (2024) explains that alumni networks in higher education have a significant influence on graduates' career development because they enable individuals to gain access to job opportunities, industry information, and professional relationships previously unavailable through formal academic channels. The results of this study show a similar pattern, where Bina Darma University alumni directly benefit from the distribution of career information facilitated by the university through the Alumni Unit.

Another significant finding is the role of the Alumni Unit as a facilitator for building professional networks among alumni and between alumni and the industrial world. Based on field observations, Bina Darma University regularly holds seminars, webinars, alumni forums, and experience-sharing activities featuring alumni who have entered the professional world in various job sectors. These activities empirically serve as a means of establishing new professional connections among alumni while creating a space for exchanging work experiences and developing professional competencies. Within the framework of Social Capital Theory, social relationships built through alumni networks generate social capital that individuals can leverage to gain access to economic resources, strategic information, and broader career opportunities. This perspective aligns with research. Husna et al (2022) which emphasizes that alumni in the higher education system are not merely part of the educational output, but also strategic stakeholders capable of contributing to institutional development and the formation of sustainable professional relationships. Thus, the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit functions as an institutional actor that mediates the systematic formation of alumni social capital.

Besides In addition to its communication and professional relationship facilitation functions, the study also found that alumni database management is the main foundation of all alumni programs run by the university. Based on the research results, the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University routinely updates alumni data through filling out digital forms and conducting periodic tracer studies. This data is used to map alumni conditions, determine the distribution of employment sectors, identify alumni who have achieved strategic positions in the world of work, and become the basis for decision-making in designing the next alumni program. In modern alumni management studies, alumni databases are no longer viewed as administrative archives, but rather as a source of strategic information for institutional development. Sumandito et al (2026) explains that an integrated alumni network information system enables universities to conduct tracer studies more effectively while simultaneously building sustainable, data-driven professional communication. The research findings indicate that Bina Darma University has begun implementing a data-driven alumni management model, although the system's effectiveness still depends on the consistency of regular alumni information updates.

This study also found that the implementation of tracer studies is one of the main instruments supporting the function of the Alumni Unit. Based on field data, tracer studies are not only used for administrative purposes for institutional accreditation, but also utilized to determine alumni career development, the relevance of the field of work to the academic competencies acquired during college, the waiting period for employment after graduation, and the alumni's professional development in general. The strategic use of tracer studies indicates a paradigm shift in alumni management, where universities are no longer solely focused on internal evaluations, but are starting to use alumni data as a basis for improving institutional quality. Salabi et al (2024) This study demonstrates that tracer study data significantly contributes to program evaluation, improving graduate quality, and developing curriculum relevance to workplace needs. The findings of this study expand on this argument by demonstrating that tracer studies can also serve as an instrument for identifying potential alumni professional networks to support long-term institutional relationships.

In On the other hand, research results show that the implementation of the alumni program at Bina Darma University still faces several structural challenges. The first obstacle relates to the low level of alumni participation in various university-organized activities. Based on interviews with alumni unit managers, many alumni do not actively participate in university activities due to time constraints, work priorities, and a decline in emotional attachment to the institution after entering the workforce. These findings suggest that the success of alumni engagement is not solely determined by the quality of the program, but also influenced by the extent to which the institution is able to create value that alumni perceive as relevant. Rahman (2021) explained that one of the main challenges in alumni empowerment management in higher education is maintaining active alumni participation in the long term. This research reinforces this finding, as low alumni participation is a major obstacle to optimizing professional network development programs.

The second obstacle identified relates to the dynamics of alumni data updates. High alumni mobility, changes in workplaces, changes in telephone numbers, changes in email addresses, and the increasingly widespread geographical distribution of alumni make it difficult for universities to maintain an up-to-date alumni database. This limitation directly impacts the effectiveness of career information distribution and the organization of alumni activities. In the context of the digital transformation of higher education, these challenges highlight the importance of developing a technology-based alumni information system that enables alumni to update their data independently. Hamid et al (2021) emphasizes that a digital-based alumni information system plays a crucial role in improving the efficiency of alumni data management while supporting the rapid and accurate distribution of career information. This research demonstrates that the need for digitizing alumni systems becomes increasingly urgent as the number of alumni continues to grow and their distribution becomes more widespread.

Conceptually, the results of this study demonstrate that the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit has moved toward a digital-based alumni management model and sustainable professional relationships. This finding is consistent with other research. Rista et al (2024) which explains that the digitalization of alumni relations in higher education is an important factor in increasing communication effectiveness, accelerating information distribution, and expanding connectivity between alumni and educational institutions. Sharma et al (2026) also shows that the development of technological innovation plays a strategic role in strengthening relationship management between universities and alumni through more adaptive digital systems. In this study, the use of digital media has helped the Alumni Unit of Bina Darma University maintain relationships with alumni, although its effectiveness is still influenced by the quality of the alumni database and the level of user participation.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit plays a far more complex strategic function than traditional perceptions of alumni management. The Alumni Unit acts not only as a graduate data administrator, but has evolved into a facilitator of institutional communication, a provider of career information access, a liaison between alumni and the professional world, a strategic database manager, and a driver of long-term alumni social capital development. From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the argument that the success of modern alumni management is greatly influenced by an institution's ability to build an institutional networking ecosystem that enables alumni to obtain tangible professional benefits after graduation. From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes that universities need to view the Alumni Unit as a strategic instrument for developing the institution's reputation, increasing graduate employability, and strengthening long-term relationships between the university and its alumni. Thus, alumni management can no longer be positioned as a secondary administrative function, but rather as an integral part of the development strategy of higher education institutions in the knowledge-based economy era.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study shows that the Bina Darma University Alumni Unit has a strategic role in building a

professional network for alumni through several main functions, namely as a communication liaison between alumni and the institution, a provider of access to career information, a facilitator for the development of professional relationships, as well as an alumni database manager and implementer of tracer studies that support the sustainability of institutional relationships. The results of the study also show that the existence of the Alumni Unit is no longer limited to administrative functions, but has become a vital part of supporting alumni career development and strengthening long-term relationships between universities and their graduates. However, the effectiveness of the program still faces challenges such as low alumni participation, limited alumni data updates, and the wide distribution of alumni, which impacts the effectiveness of communication and the ongoing implementation of the program. Based on these findings, this study confirms that optimizing the role of the Alumni Unit requires strengthening a more adaptive digital technology-based management strategy, particularly through the development of an integrated alumni information system and enhancing programs relevant to alumni's professional needs. Universities also need to strengthen alumni engagement through collaborative programs that can provide tangible benefits for alumni career development. Further research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of digital alumni engagement models at a broader range of higher education institutions to produce more innovative and sustainable alumni management models.

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