

FINANCIAL HELP



“Helping your alma mater through financial support is really helping yourself,” says George McDowell, assistant director of University Advancement and head of the University’s Annual Fund, which helps bring in more than \$1.1 million each year.

“By showing support for their university, alumni help build the reputation of their alma mater, and in turn, that builds confidence and the reputation of the graduate’s diploma,” McDowell reasons, pointing out a number of national surveys, including the popular and respected annual evaluation issued by *U.S. News and World Report* make use of alumni philanthropic support in ranking universities across the U.S.

“Those in charge at *U.S. News and World Report* believe the level of alumni support

is a clear indication of a graduate’s satisfaction with the level of education he or she received. The alumni giving rate is a key component in its overall evaluation — the ranking — of each college or university. Currently, SRU’s alumni giving rate stands at 14 percent. We would really like it to be at 17 percent and have been working hard to keep increasing the number of SRU alumni willing to support their alma mater. That 3 percent increase could raise us to a ‘tier one’ university in the northeast region covered by the magazine’s report.”

As part of that work, during the regular school year a team of 20 students work the ‘SRU Phonathon’ spending Sunday through Thursday evenings calling SRU graduates to update them on campus activities and for philanthropic support. “Alumni are most often called by students in the college from which they graduated. Prior to the calls, we have talked with the college deans asking them to set priorities and to suggest where money is most needed. For example, Dean [William] McKinney needs a new Performing Arts Center, and Dean [Bruce] Russell is always looking for addition funding for faculty/student research projects,” McDowell says.

The phonathon calls generate nearly \$250,000 in pledges from alumni and University friends. McDowell points to the new \$14-million Science and Technology Building, saying, “While the state provided the initial construction funds, we need to raise additional funds to ensure the necessary equipment and technology amenities are available to students making use of its classrooms. How we equip the building is as important as the size of the classrooms, the auditorium or the laboratories.”

TO SRU BOOSTS DIPLOMA VALUE

“It is almost always great to get to talk to our alumni,” says Abby Lieberman, a senior, majoring in elementary education. “Many I talk with ask about a favorite professor, or what is happening with a specific sports team. Sometimes they provide a quick memory from their days at SRU, especially when SRU is in the news. They always seem friendly and enjoy hearing from a student on campus,” she adds.

“The best part of the work is being able to tell graduates about things happening on campus. In the fall, callers will be talking about the new ING Performing Arts Series and homecoming when we make the calls,” says Lyndse Costabile, who joined the phonathon team in 2003. The junior finance and communication major says the calling experience helps build confidence in talking to strangers and will be a bonus on her resume when it comes job time.

“We are trying to boost our numbers, and because the percentage is based on our undergraduates for whom we have addresses: It really does not take all that many new donors to boost our overall percent rate. If we can get 375 new donations, we go up 1 percent,” McDowell explains.

Donations may be made at any level and count in the “alumni giving category.” Donors may give online by visiting www.srufnd.org, he notes adding, “We are especially appreciative of those who donate annually and thus help keep our numbers positive in the magazine’s report.”

Those who hear from an SRU Phonathon Student are urged to seriously consider a pledge and to then follow up with a contribution. Those who miss the call may send a check, payable to the SRU Foundation, Inc., to the Annual Fund Office or call 724-738-4400 for further information.



Four of the 20 students who work the SRU Phonathon include (from left) Jean Rocourt, Lyndse Costabile, Tosha Costabile and Abby Lieberman. They call alumni seeking philanthropic support to advance University initiatives.

