



September 2020 Report to the AAMC Board of Governors

From Dawn Cunningham

BACKGROUND & LAUNCH

- Spring 2018: AAMC BOG agreed to pay for a three-year contract for a mentoring/networking platform offered by PeopleGrove. We received a request to do so from the Mills VP for Advancement, alumnae relations director, and career services director, as the College did not have the funds for the platform. Our decision to grant request was based on a review of the product and a review of Wellesley College's steps toward successful implementation of the platform (known as the Wellesley Hive).
- Goals were to develop a mentoring/networking tool that would benefit both students and alumnae; further engage alumnae in support of the College; and model a College-AAMC collaboration.
- We hired a part-time graduate student worker as platform manager in cooperation with the Lokey School; established a steering committee initially made up of Vji, Dawn, Nikole Hilgeman Adams of Mills' alumnae relations office, and Inez Barbosa of Mills' career services office (later Mohamed Sesay of career services and Ife Tayo Walker of Lokey School were added); and convened a larger advisory group made up of diverse Mills alums.
- The implementation phase of approximately 4 months included making necessary customization decisions (eg, industry categories and additional profile information) in consultation with the advisory group; conducting a platform naming contest; and testing by the advisory committee.

- Summer 2018: Soft launch of MillsConnect to alumnae took place in July via email invitations, followed by user surveys for feedback and final adjustments. Platform launched to students in September via email invitations and in-person networking events. A roll-out/presentation to alumnae took place during Reunion.

ABOUT MILLSCONNECT/PEOPLEGROVE PLATFORM

We are using a basic version of the PeopleGrove platform that features the following functions:

- User profile
- Explore community: search for alums by industry, location, major, race/ethnicity, graduation year, etc.
- Discussion board
- Resource library
- Email campaign tool
- Email messages between individual users
- Video meetings
- Database management

Other options that PeopleGrove offers but which we have not paid for/incorporated include a recruitment module, student peer mentoring for retention, and groups.

PeopleGrove has had considerable success in higher education and is used and recommended by: Wellesley, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, Williams, Trinity, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Georgetown, Michigan, and Cornell (see more customers at <https://www.peoplegrove.com/>).

PERFORMANCE

- Users have increased from 582 alums and 13 students just after our soft launch in July 2018 to 1,433 alums and 382 students today. See figure 1, page 5.

- 13.74% of users (254 individuals) have made a two-way connection through emails sent via the platform.
- 215 messages (including initial inquiries and responses) were sent between individual users using the platform in Year 1. In Year 2, messages sent grew 88%. To date, the number of messages sent between users since the launch is 1,047, including 230 sent by students and 807 sent by alumnae. See figure 2, page 6.
- Response rate of alums to messages sent by students or other alums has averaged around 50%.
- Since the launch, PeopleGrove tallied 85,264 “actions taken” on MillsConnect, meaning the number of individual emails opened or pages viewed. See figure 3, page 7.

ONGOING WORK REQUIRED TO SUPPORT PLATFORM

- Kate Beckwith currently serves as platform manager. Work includes: approving new member registrations, sending reminder individual reminder emails to alums who haven’t responded to email inquiries, transitioning recent graduates to alum status, sending occasional marketing/invitation emails to new/unregistered students and alums, producing a newsletter.
- Mills College Office of Career Connections and Community Engagement promotes MillsConnect to students through their communications and events.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, AAMC, Alumnae Relations, and Career Connections had been collaborating on face-to-face networking events each semester that brought students together with alums participating in MillsConnect. (Unrelated to MillsConnect, Career Connections continues to organize a series of “career conversations” featuring alums in specific fields).

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges:

- The number of students who have registered is lower than our initial goal of half the student body.
- Alums aren't responding to email inquiries at the rate we'd like to see (50%, vs 70% average at other colleges).
- Students appear to need more education/coaching regarding the importance of networks/mentors and how to develop them than we had anticipated.
- Three-year contract expires in March 2021. Cost has been \$9,000/year but is likely to increase.

Opportunities:

- Initial goal for registered alums exceeded (1,000).
- Continued growth in registered users with minimal marketing investment.
- A slight uptick in number of messages sent in March-September 2020 vs same period in 2019.
- A whole semester/academic year of online courses and events may lead to greater student demand for online networking options.

Figure 1: Growth in users

Total Users 

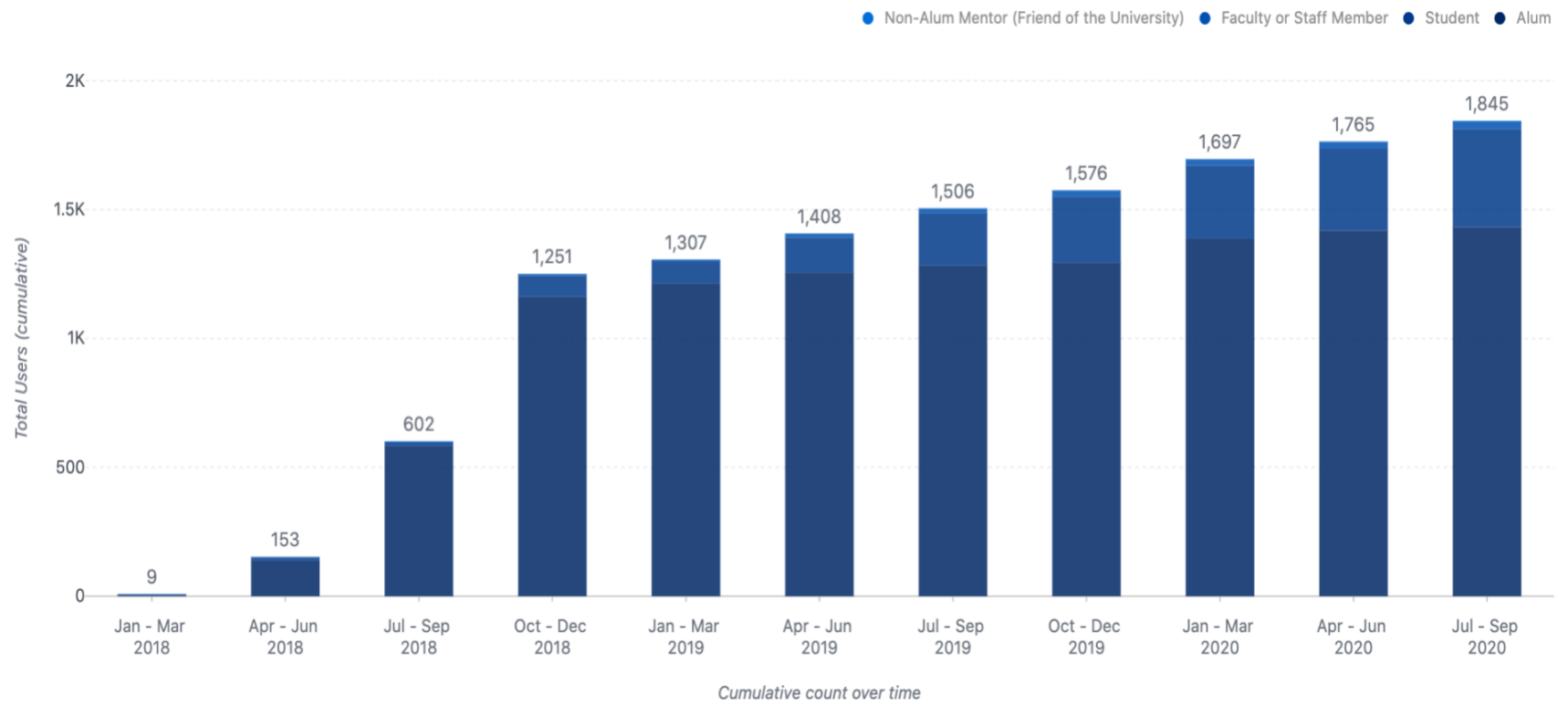


Figure 2: Growth in messages sent

Total messages 

User Types 

● Faculty or Staff Member ● Student ● Alum

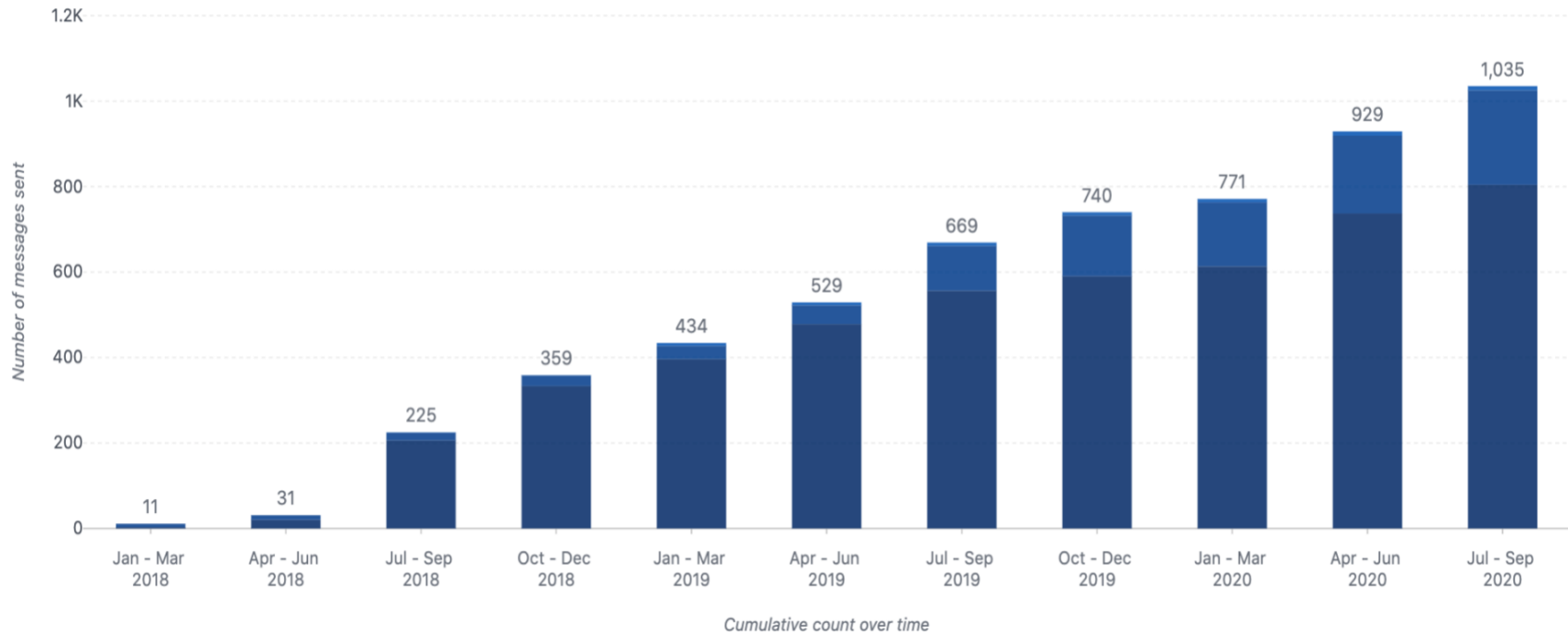


Figure 3: Actions taken (emails opened and pages viewed)

Total actions 

Actions 

 Opened Email  Viewed Page

