Alumni Nests & Interest Circles

Leader Handbook

**Purpose:**
Alumni-led groups, both geographically- and interest-area-defined, serve to bring together alumni of all campuses and all programs, parents of students, and friends of the University for:

- Cultural events
- Sports outings
- Social activities
- Community service projects
- Communication
- Educational events
- New student recruitment
- University development efforts

Groups also:

- Sponsor educational programs for alumni and the local community.
- Plan activities that encourage passion and pride among Brenau supporters.
- Welcome new alumni into the folds.
- Help recruit outstanding students and promote positive public relations.
- Strive to increase public awareness of Brenau University.
- Aid in placing students in internship and professional jobs.
- Support Brenau University’s fund-raising efforts.
What is a Regional Alumni Nest?

Organized groups of alumni linked by common geographical area are known as Brenau Alumni Nests, a tribute to the Crow’s Nest on the Brenau campus in Gainesville, Georgia. The symbolic purpose of the Crow’s Nest has been to allow students to understand and appreciate the rising ranks of each class, from Freshman to Senior, and beyond. As alumni, the connection to Brenau and a graduate’s rising rank through lifelong learning are as strong as ever.

Generally, Brenau Alumni Nests may be organized in areas with at least 50 alumni where a Nest president has volunteered to lead. Nests may be centered around a city, county, multiple counties, portion of a state, or entire state. Alumni from all Brenau campuses and all Brenau degree programs will be invited to join their local Nest. The goal of a Nest is to provide integrated programs to alumni from all Brenau colleges.

What is an Interest Circle?

Organized groups of alumni linked by common areas of interest are known as “Interest Circles.” Generally, Interest Circles may be organized for groups of at least 50 alumni where a Circle president has volunteered to lead. Interest Circles may revolve around a common academic major, previous participation in a Brenau campus organization, or areas of professional business. The goal of an Interest Circle is to provide a connection between the University and alumni who are passionate about their area of interest.

Programming for Interest Circles will generally be offered on the Gainesville campus or virtually.
How to Start an Alumni Nest or Interest Circle:

All Nests & Circles must be approved by the Brenau Office of Alumni Relations. At minimum, each group is expected to:

- Have at least one alumni volunteer to serve as Leader/President.
- Plan and execute at least two events per year, one of which must be a planning/business meeting.

1. **Contact the Office of Alumni Relations.**
   If you are interested in starting a Nest or Circle, and you have already identified a President (which may be yourself), contact our Office at 770-718-5307 or alumni.news@brenau.edu.

2. **Review your potential membership.**
   For Nests, we will review the geographical area for potential members. Nests may be centered around a key city (spanning a 30-50 mile radius), located in one or more counties, or comprised of a portion of a state(s). Once population numbers are returned, we will discuss with the volunteer leader the potential for a successful Nest in the designated geographical area.

   For Circles, we will review the possible membership population globally. Once population numbers are returned, we will discuss with the volunteer leader the potential for a successful Circle in the designated area of interest.

3. **Reach out to other possible leaders.**
   The best way to see if others are interested in participating in the Nest or Circle is to reach out and gauge interest in, and commitment to, starting a group. The Office of Alumni Relations will send an interest email on your behalf to potential members.

4. **Plan your Interest Meeting/Kick-Off event.**
   Make plans for a more formal Interest Meeting or a social Kick-Off. The office of Alumni Relations will assist with a sample agenda, key talking points, and a checklist to get your group going. An Alumni Relations staff member will also make plans to attend this event when possible. You should leave your Interest Meeting/Kick-Off with contact information of all who attended, ideas for potential alumni volunteers to help lead the group, and a general calendar of events for the upcoming year.

5. **Follow-Up.**
   Contact the Office of Alumni Relations to discuss the kick-off event and decide upon next steps for your particular situation.
How the Brenau Office of Alumni Relations Supports You:

- We will support Nest & Circle leadership by providing copies of the Leader Handbook, by offering marketing and programming suggestions, and by responding to phone calls and emails from alumni leaders within two business days.

- We will design, print, fund, and prepare one mailing per year for each Nest or Circle. In the first year of establishment (or re-establishment), this mailing must be the Interest Meeting/ Kick-Off invitation. In following years, leaders choose the purpose of the funded mailing. This mailing will encompass only the designated area/participants outlined in your charter documents.

- We will pay expenses for Office of Alumni Relations staff to be present at pertinent Nest or Circle events throughout the year, when possible. Special attention will be paid to attendance at the Interest Meeting/ Kick-Off.

- We will create and maintain a webpage on the Brenau University website for your Nest or Circle.

- We will maintain both a mailing and email database for your group members, and we will send information on your behalf, when needed. We will provide you with mailing labels for your group should you choose to send a mailing on your own.

- We will assist with booking Brenau University speakers/guests. (Examples of guests speakers may be professors, coaches, deans, Athletic Director, President, etc.)

- We will assist in obtaining group tickets to events on the Brenau campuses, as well as events in your local community, when possible.

- We will provide name tags and other Brenau promotional materials, as necessary, for Nest and Circle events planned at least six weeks in advance.

- We will provide publicity about your group and events through the Brenau Window, University website, facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, e-newsletters, and other relevant campus and local publications. Event publicity in the magazine requires meeting quarterly deadlines (Feb. 15, May 15, Aug. 15, and Nov. 15), and publicity in all other forms is guaranteed with a six-week notice.

- We will provide you with up-to-date and accurate information about the University, its programs, and alumni relations efforts.

- We will train your leadership team to effectively communicate and promote opportunities to support Brenau University financially.
How You Support the Brenau Office of Alumni Relations:

- You will organize and execute at least two meetings per year, one of which must be a business/planning meeting.

- You will inform the Office of Alumni Relations of all planned Nest & Circle functions at least six weeks in advance to ensure proper promotion. (A copy of all messages distributed to your group, including emails, should be sent to the Office of Alumni Relations.)

- You will provide the Office of Alumni Relations with quarterly updates about your Nest or Circle activities, including submission of photos for the website and *Brenau Window* magazine. (Magazine deadlines are Feb. 15, May 15, Aug. 15, and Nov. 15.)

- You will provide the Office of Alumni Relations with a hard or electronic copy of all meeting minutes within one week of the meeting date.

- You will provide the Office of Alumni Relations with a list of all officers and their current contact information (mailing address, phone, and email) within 30 days of election or appointment changes.

- You will provide the Office of Alumni Relations with a list of all participants at your events within one week of the event date.

- You will inform the Office of Alumni Relations of any address changes, names changes, or deaths of the alumni in your group.

- You will provide membership and participation opportunities to alumni of all Brenau programs (including, but not limited to, The Academy, Women’s College, Evening & Weekend College, and Online graduates).

- You will always represent Brenau University in a positive light within your group and in your greater community, when applicable. You will accurately represent the University’s goals and achievements in the public eye.

- You will prepare yourself to answer questions and provide accurate information related to giving opportunities and ways to support Brenau University financially.
How Should a Nest or Circle be Structured?

The minimum leadership requirement for a Nest or Circle is an alumni President. However, it is strongly recommended that additional positions be created and filled as a part of your Leadership Team. In fact, the ideal structure will provide a means to ensure the President position is filled in the future. A good way to make sure this occurs is to train your Vice President to take over the President role when your term ends. (Terms of office vary and will be established by your Nest or Circle leaders.)

Some suggested positions for your Leadership Team include:

**Executive Board**
- President *(required)*
- Vice President *(President-Elect)*
- Secretary / Historian

**Planning Committee**
- Membership Chair
- PR/Communications Chair
- Social/Networking Chair
- Young Alumni Chair
- Collegiate Relations Chair
- Philanthropy/Community Service Chair
- Education Chair

**Benefits of Building a Leadership Team:**

A Leadership Team gives the President a support structure. One person can only do so much on his/her own, and burnout will set in without the benefit of a larger Team to share responsibilities. A Leadership Team also brings diversity to your group, allowing perspectives of alumni who had very different experiences as Brenau students to be heard and understood.

Your Leadership Team provides continuity of your group as volunteer leaders move away or transition out of their positions over time for various reasons. A strong Team prevents a “shut-down” in the event that a President needs to step down.

An ideal Leadership Team will grow and change with the group, uniting new alumni leaders with more seasoned ones on an annual or semi-annual basis. The Team should meet at least once a year (possibly monthly for larger, more active Nests and Circles) for planning purposes and to keep the group’s goals at the forefront.
**Programming Ideas for Alumni Nests:**

The goal of a Nest is to provide integrated programs to alumni from all Brenau colleges. Depending on the size and composition of each Nest, a proportionate amount of programming may be geared exclusively toward the Academy, Women’s College, Evening & Weekend, and/or Online program alumni, in consult with the Office of Alumni Relations.

The Office of Alumni Relations will rely heavily upon Nest leaders to independently create and execute integrated regional programs, with emphasis on the program areas below. Alumni Relations will fund the promotion of one event per year, and whenever possible, a representative from the Alumni Relations Office will attend that event in order to raise awareness of External Affairs efforts and generate interest in giving opportunities.

Nests should allow six weeks notice for Alumni Relations and PR to properly promote all events.

**Interest Meeting & Kick-Off**

Once a President has been selected to lead a particular Nest and the Office of Alumni Relations has decided upon the most beneficial regional boundaries for the Nest area, an Interest Meeting/ Kick-Off event will be planned. The Nest president and leadership team will plan the event, and Brenau Alumni Relations will create an invitation, fund the distribution via USPS and Constant Contact, promote the event online, submit the event to the next issue of the *Brenau Window*, and provide a suggested agenda. Whenever possible, a representative from Alumni Relations will attend the event.

**Educational & Cultural**

Nests are encouraged to host at least one educational event per year. The Office of Alumni Relations is happy to assist in booking a Brenau University speaker for the event, or Nests can choose to select a distinguished alumni or public figure from their region as a speaker. Alternatively, educational events may be hands-on and/or family-oriented programs, such as a nature hike, star-gazing, trip to the museum, or attendance at a lecture or play.

**Community Service**

**(Brenau Better World Day)**

Nests are encouraged to host at least one community service event per year. Service may be a hands-on, experiential service project, such as a Habitat for Humanity build or day at a soup kitchen, or a more passive project, such as a canned food drive or donation collection in conjunction with another program. To make community service projects more collaborative, the Office of Alumni Relations has designated the 3rd Saturday in September as “Brenau Better World Day.” This is the suggested day that Nests hold their annual community service project, creating a nationwide team of Brenau alumni working for a common cause on the same day.

**Social**

Purely social events are a fun way to meet fellow alumni and introduce them into the Nest structure. Social events can be formal or casual, free or charged. From a potluck in someone’s
home, to a night on the town, social events are an easy way to break the ice. From time to time, the University President will arrange regional social events in conjunction with his travel schedule. When this occurs, the Office of Alumni Relations will work hand-in-hand with the local Nest to make arrangements and promote the event.

**Career/Networking**
Brenau Career Services is happy to work with alumni on programming ideas for professionally-focused events. Career Services can provide information on resume writing, portfolio design, interview skills, job searches, and more. Career Services also offers job search assistance to all alumni free of charge, and alumni are invited to attend career workshops on the Gainesville campus.
Contact Alumni Relations

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