



## International Seminar Cercle des Amis AFS and AFS Alumni DK

November 28-29, 2015 in Paris

### Summary of Minutes 2016-02-13

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## Participants

- Cercle des Amis AFS : Maximilien Marxer, Françoise Perraud, Michèle Ruffat, Françoise Szigeti, Olivier Vuillod, Janie Blanchard, Bruno Poisson
- AFS Alumni DK: Klaus Faartoft, Kirsten M. Anttila, Birgitta My Anttila, Niels Mikkelsen
- AFS Alumni Indonesia : Avanti Sukma
- Invited guest : Michel Antoine, former president of AFS Ile-de-France, current board member of AFS Ile-de-France and former board member of AFS-VSF

## Welcome

- Maximilien thanks everyone for coming, with special greetings to Avanti Sukma. She is a recent returnee from a year in Italy and a new member of this group. She has come from Indonesia to investigate how an alumni structure can be energized in her country to more efficiently further AFS's global goals and mission, based on our previously forwarded reference document « Creating Vital AFS Alumni Organizations : Useful Guidelines », produced as a result of our workshop at the Centennial in Paris, November 2014.
- Attendees then shortly introduce themselves, highlighting what in their life experience and professional background is relevant to their current engagement with AFS Partners and AFS Alumni in their countries.
- Klaus and Maximilien, as co-chairs, present the various issues to be discussed during the seminar. One of our key objectives, as hands-on, grass-roots national organizations, is to significantly contribute fresh proposals and comments to the global Board of Trustees Alumni Engagement Work Group, currently preparing a Report due in January 2016.

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## Presentation of AFS Indonesia, by Avanti Sukma

Avanti gives the group a short presentation of AFS in Indonesia, where it has been active for 55 years. “Bina Antarbudaya”, also known as The Indonesian Foundation for Intercultural Learning”, now runs or partners with different types of programs:

- **The “hosting” one-year program** : students from all over the world, aged 15 to 18, live in an Indonesian family for some ten months. Besides studying in an Indonesian high school, they are expected to learn about Indonesian culture and customs, and socialize with the Indonesian community.
- **Community service** : volunteer participants, who do not study in a local high school, are involved in the local Community Project Organization (CPO). They stay in a host family and can learn leadership by helping the CPO to face the challenges and problems in Indonesian society. This practical intercultural experience is a great way to develop global awareness, sensitivity and personal development.



- **The « sending » one-year program : the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program** was launched in Indonesia in 2003. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs (ECA) to provide scholarships for high school students from countries with significant Muslim populations to study for one academic year in the U.S. YES students serve as “youth ambassadors” of their home country, promoting mutual understanding by forming lasting relationships with their host families and communities. Participants live with a host family, attend an American high school, acquire leadership skills, and engage in activities to learn about U.S. society and values; they also help educate Americans about their home country and culture. Since 2003, over 920 Indonesian students have completed the YES program.
- The competition for the YES scholarship is open at no cost to all applicants who meet the following requirements: 1) Be between the ages of 16-17 by the start of program; 2) Be enrolled in 9th,10th or 11th grade in a secondary school at the time of application; 3) Have the equivalent of a B average or better without failing grades; 4) Must not have been born in the U.S. or have a parent that is an American citizen.
- There are multiple rounds to the YES application and a tough selection process. All applicants are required to take an English proficiency exam, write a proctored essay, complete a YES program application, and participate in group and individual in-person interviews. All finalists are selected on the basis of merit.
- Returnees are expected to contribute to the YES program by joining in the one-week orientation session : outward-bound students are prepared for their roles as future ambassadors of their country and duly reminded of the key traits of their culture and « Indonesian identity », not to be unduly diluted after a year abroad.

There is no structure yet that brings alumni together in Indonesia. They tend to ignore the AFS organization and get together individually « through the grapevine » (i.e. Facebook, etc.) with what Avanti calls « a snowball effect ». Now might be the right time to get organized and have a formal Indonesian alumni structure get off the ground.

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## « AFS now and in the future », by Michel Antoine

Michel Antoine, a student from Dijon, the capital city of Burgundy, spent a year as an AFS in Ohio in 1968-1969. Michel Antoine is a senior official working for the French House of Representatives. He has an in-depth knowledge of and indefatigable interest in AFS: he has been President of AFS France for three years (1979, 80, 81), has served as President of AFS Ile-de-France (the Paris region), then has served again for 2 terms as President of AFS France. He has been particularly active on the fronts of social diversity and new programs. His experience can help our group better understand how AFS has remained relevant through the years, so that we can focus on our vision as alumni making a unique contribution to this vibrant community.

### 1) History

Three key words characterize AFS: **utopia, change, creativity**.

- Utopia : promote PEACE and a more just world – the world can be different if people



“walk together, talk together”...and work together.

- Permanent change:
  - Name: American Field Service seamlessly evolves from service on the battlefield to International Scholarships to Intercultural learning.
  - Recruitment: applicants were originally from rather well-off families; as of the mid-sixties, students from a more modest background could go to the US as well.
  - Number of countries involved: in the seventies, the AFS became truly international. It evolved from the US hosting “the rest of the world” in schools and families to a truly multilateral organization, in which any country both sends and hosts any student from any other nation.
- Creativity: flexible bylaws enable AFS to define itself differently as its contents evolve. AFS also has the capacity to develop new programs: Leonardo, Comenius (Erasmus for high schools), programs for inner city schools aimed at “young ambassadors” from disadvantaged suburbs, etc.
  - → Throughout the years, AFS has retained the same energetic enthusiasm and generous spirit to promote a more just and more peaceful world.

## 2) Today

If we take France as an example, what does AFS stand for today? AFS France sends 350 students abroad and hosts 450 students from all over the world: our country receives more than it sends, which is a considerable challenge.

- AFS stands for **quality** : we select students, prepare them, have contacts with their families, follow their adjustment to their new surroundings, help them readapt and assess their experience when they come home.
- AFS stands for **openness** to what happens outside of AFS : distinctive characteristics of all AFSers – comprehension of a new culture, adaptation to a new environment – could be fruitfully applied should AFS, for example, try somehow to help in the present **refugee crisis** in Europe.

What can we do for and with these people who left their possessions behind, do not speak the local languages and do not share the cultural codes of the countries they have found refuge in? This is an acute crisis situation that offers a striking parallel with what caused the creation of AFS in April 1915. We cannot just stand by and watch: we should try to organize language and culture seminars, work with powerful partner institutions (at local, national and European levels) to “train the trainers”. The European Union is setting funds aside to finance new programs to help the refugees: now is the time to be where the action is and contribute, not with money, but with our AFS experience, to one of the major social projects in Europe for the years to come.

## 3) AFS in the future

For a century, AFS has always adapted to its changing environment: it is anything but a conservative organization. So, what is the project on which we could mobilize people in the future?

- Of course, there are management and cost issues to be tackled. For example, the overhead cost of the AFS structure is too high. The cost of sending a student abroad has risen from being negligible in the sixties to some 2000 euros for a 2-month stay and over 10 000 euros for a year in the US (while the host family gets no money). The average scholarship is 1200 euros: alumni structures do contribute funds for scholarship, but financing above a certain level will prove quite a challenge – and this is not what people signed for when they joined an alumni network.
- We used to live in a pacified world, at least in the Western world. We don't any more. **How can we bring our collective experience to bear upon the prevention of conflicts** or the management of post-conflicts or crisis management? **Intercultural learning is not a goal, it's a tool.** And **AFS is a peace organization**, it is not simply an intercultural organization comparable to similar youth organizations.
- **If our challenge then is to promote peace through “global citizenship”, how can we turn this goal into a practical project?** A colloquium on the theme of Global Citizenship will be organized at our next seminar in September 2016. (see below Section “Goals and objectives 2016)

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## Appraisal of work done in 2014-2015

### Conclusion of the work 2014-15

The results from the SWOT analysis, focused on the work done until now, and carried out by each country prior to the seminar, proved to be valuable food for thought. They will be discussed at length in various sections of this document.

### Among the relevant points

- If we argue our case well enough before the AFS Alumni Engagement Work Group of the Board of Trustees, building an efficient alumni network of international “sister” structures can be done. Working together in a fully open and transparent manner makes us all stronger.
- Once a document has been released, only the authors may change it in order to have control over revisions and updates. Identifying the source of documents quoted would be appreciated. We have included a citation at the end of the “Helpful Guidelines” document to that effect.
- Collaboration with ‘followers’ (from the Centennial workshop) is one-way and written. Because personal contacts are most efficient, we should aim at finding trusted contact persons in each country.
- Info about upcoming AFS Alumni Engagement Work Group (WG) phone conferences arrive only a very few days before its meetings, leaving too little time to discuss the issues at hand with the alumni support base.
- Detailed minutes from WG phone conferences would be useful and provide transparency. Information circuits need to be defined and made public.
- When more countries are involved, careful follow-up on decisions is needed.



## Planned 2016 developments

### I - The « Helpful Guidelines » reference document

- **Should we revise it? YES.**
- Which is the reference version? The June 8<sup>th</sup> version.
- How do we update the content? We will not attach appendixes (too bulky and clumsy to use). Alterations jointly approved will be integrated into each newly revised version.
- Who is in charge of the revising process? Kirsten and Klaus are the only contact points who can update/revise the Guidelines.
- When will this document be ready? By February 15, 2016.
- **How do we disseminate the document and get alumni to contribute ideas?**

With two key principles in mind: transparency and accessibility, we decide on a two-step process :

1) The updated document will be published on the home page of the websites of the French, Danish and Indonesian alumni organizations.

2) Maximilien volunteers to **set up and monitor a public blog named « AFS Alumni Structures »** referenced on Google and Facebook. It is a realistic, visible and inexpensive initiative totally in line with our financial and human resources. The blog should be up and running ASAP.

**The specific angle of this blog: whatever is published online will be alumni oriented.** It will develop a viewpoint that strongly supports and complements AFS International's vision for the future. It will thus dovetail nicely with the AFS International « Janus » newsletter, which has a larger audience - and we would be honored and delighted to contribute to « Janus » from our own alumni vantage point.

Using English as a language, it will be a virtual newsletter, our common window to the rest of the world, and – relatively speaking - a sort of « think tank » for the budding alumni community. Readers visiting « Alumni Denmark, Alumni France, Alumni Indonesia, etc.» (not only returnees, but all people who share the ethos) will be invited by the blog-master to contribute creative comments and proposals.

For example, should we want to organize a workshop or a seminar on a given topic: who can host the conference, when? What particular themes? Who can be guest speakers? Etc., the goal being to creatively use the vast untapped experience of alumni worldwide.

- **How can we trace returnees and host families, and make them aware of our existence?**



- 1) Make full use of our alumni group on Facebook;
- 2) Enlist professional « communications » experts (for example, a journalist) to spread the news ;
- 3) Make full use of social events, initiated by us or others, that generate a lot of press coverage. For example, the November 2015 big event « From trenches to bridges » in Alsace - a one-week gathering of some 200 young AFSers spending a year in France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, hosted in Strasbourg on the theme of peace with some 100 local high-school seniors. The Cercle des Amis AFS, AFS Alumni DK, AFS-IP, and other donors, financed a plaque to honor Richard Hall, the first AFS ambulance driver killed in action on December 25, 1915. He is the only American buried in the local Moosch French military cemetery. The plaque was unveiled on November 3<sup>rd</sup> in the presence of 16 members of his family.

## II – The Logo issue

After a brief discussion, it has been decided to bring this complex topic forward when our group meets again in September 2016.

## III - Live presentation of the Cercle des Amis AFS's Database

- 10,046 profiles are currently registered in the database, with 837 working mail addresses. There is also a 2000+ number of partially useful contact information.
- Full access is restricted to the 200 members who have paid their 30 euros annual membership dues.
- The **custom-made, flexible software solution** makes it possible to manage detailed data analysis of the personal information given by members, as well as their AFS history (year of departure, host country, subsequent volunteer activity, AFS events attended, etc...).
- Could the software solution be **shared with AFS Alumni DK or with any other interested alumni sister group**? It is not an off-the-shelf product. It was specially developed by a volunteer friend of Maximilien Marxer, who currently lets the Cercle use the software for free. Sharing the « blank » software can be done, but it would entail revising the letter of understanding Le Cercle has with this professional and having the sister organizations pay him some royalties, to be agreed upon with the aforesaid developer. Commands and fields names would henceforth be in English.
- Sharing the content of a database, i.e. detailed member personal information, would however be a far more complex legal matter, since France, for one, has strict laws protecting the privacy of its citizens. Existing databases (in the local languages) are private and need to be run in agreement with national legislations. This legal hurdle can be solved.

## IV - The World Café (WoCa)

- The powerful online social network still being developed by AFS International is known as the « World Café » (hereafter “WoCa” for short). Maximilien gives the group

a detailed presentation of the exceptional features of the tool that will soon connect the AFS community globally.

- The key purposes of a Facebook-like social network are (to quote the Alumni Engagement Work Group Interim Report, pages 5-6) : « furthering the mission », « finding friends/making new friends », « providing education/career opportunities », « re-engaging with AFS – as host families, sending parents and volunteers », « providing financial support », « identifying new leaders » and « creating social connections ». No mention of specifically reaching out to the alumni community is made.
- With a view to **daily managing their domestic alumni databases on a long-term basis**, is the WoCa the very practical tool that realistic, on-the-ground structures know they need?
  - Will the WoCa help them collect data, update data, track personal as well as professional changes, payment of membership dues, etc.?
  - Can the large number of returnees they would like to engage be reached through a tool like the WoCa these alumni and friends have never heard of?
  - Since only « active volunteers » will be able to access the WoCa, how do all others concretely find it and access it ? There seems to be a contradiction between some of the objectives of the WoCa, such as “re-engaging with AFS”, and some of the constraints noted.
- **Based on our practical experience, our group identifies a need for two different tools with different purposes, that are fully complementary:**
  - 1) **The World Café** : it is a global tool that ensures connectivity with other AFSers, within the same country or internationally ; it can be used as a platform to inform people about the local existence of alumni groups, projects and events.
  - 2) **Local databases in English**, used as rosters: these are practical tools that enable domestic alumni structures to directly manage and communicate with their local alumni.
    - Of course, these tools should converge by having a WoCa connection to any local database (one could type a name on the WoCa and link directly to a domestic database), thus making the WoCa truly indispensable to all users.

## V - Financing alumni organizations

### 1) France

Françoise Sziget, as treasurer of Le Cercle, launches the debate with key budget facts and figures. Le Cercle is not a « public-interest » association (as AFS-VSF France is). It therefore does not qualify for French public subsidies, despite being subject to close financial scrutiny by the French state. It may be eligible for private or other subsidies and receives small donations. It cannot issue receipts for fiscal deductions. Its financial affairs are totally distinct from those of AFS-VSF.

- Income :
  - alumni subscriptions : 30 euros annual dues x 200 paying members (including families) = 6000 euros, which « doesn't go very far » (but Le Cercle is not a commercial venture),
  - small surpluses from projects,
  - subsidies, public or private, national or European, when possible,
  - « reducing our expenses » by having another organization partially or totally pay some expenses, or by sharing the costs with it.
- Expenses:
  - scholarships to AFS students in local chapters



- contribution to one local AA each year for host family expenses or other local expenses,
- special AFS projects/events
- IT/ database application and support
- communications, mailings, postage...
- insurance
- travel expenses for special projects (as a rule, alumni volunteers pay for their own trips, expenses and accommodation)
- no salaried staff : all the work is done by unpaid volunteers.

## 2) Denmark

- Income:
  - alumni subscriptions : 50 euros annual dues x 130 paying members = 6 500 euros.
- Expenses:
  - two annual scholarships
  - an annual award to an outstanding volunteer in the national organisation
  - 3-4 meetings a year on a variety of subjects with AFS returnees as speakers : refugees, human rights, Russia and the Western countries, International career planning, ...
  - an annual AFS returnee anniversary celebration - in 2016 for AFS returnees (including host families) from 1956, 1966, etc
  - social events : numerous and very varied events, paid by members themselves
  - all travel and accommodation expenses are paid by the alumni volunteers themselves.

## 3) “Joint “expenses

- What are the **expenses** that could be « consolidated » and **jointly financed** by several sister alumni structures world-wide?
- Because most costs are local operating expenses on domestic projects, it is hard to see what could become « common » expenses.
- But there is one pressing need : **the IT development of those crucial local databases that will make the World Café relevant, because all alumni information can then be shared globally, provided the privacy questions are addressed.**

## VI - Relations with the Board of Trustees and the Alumni Engagement Work Group

- It all started at the Centennial “Returnee Day” in Paris in 2014, when the French, Danish, Japanese and American Alumni groups had a chance to present their purpose and structure during the « Creating Vital AFS Returnee Organizations » workshop they organized. We were delighted with the strong turnout and keen desire of the attendees to initiate or increase their support of such initiatives in their countries, with a view to promote a formalized AFS Alumni structure worldwide.
- The Alumni Engagement Work Group (WG) was then created directly under the supervision of the BOT, which is an indication of how important this issue seems to be. Maximilien Marxer, as a member of that 6-to-8 members group, regularly cascades to the French and Danish members whatever information he gets before and after the video conference meetings.
- The good news is that we are thus theoretically able to share documents and make comments beforehand. The frustrating news is that we get those documents at such very short notice that it is nearly impossible to prepare well-crafted, jointly agreed upon inputs to contribute to the decisions of the Work Group. The main topic of



interest of the WG seems to be the World Café. It is, of course, an essential, powerful tool that will ultimately connect the global alumni network... provided local, boots-on-the-ground structures (most being yet in the early stages of development) have duly identified and corralled those AFS returnees and families. Since we see no minutes from the WG meetings, it is difficult for us to give creative feedback on what has been discussed, however much we'd like to contribute to a WoCa still in the making or to practical orientations taking shape. With written feedback from the Work Group meetings, we would all be on the same page and share the same regularly enriched, hands-on information.

- Our group is naturally happy to contribute ideas and concrete proposals that will be somehow integrated into the WG larger thought process and report. But we would be even happier if those precisely worded phrases were attributed to their source, i.e. the document « Helpful Guidelines » jointly written by the French and Danish organizations, currently inserted as an anonymous quote or appendix to the WG report.
- Alumni structures now have a trusting, open and upbeat relation with the BOT. However, there are a few **practical issues** that our group would like the Alumni Engagement Work Group to clarify before the WG publishes its new January 2016 report, for example :
  - **Contracts** with the local structures: we understand that AFS NY is quite aware that « there is a wide variety of models for enhanced alumni engagement... there is no one size that fits all » (Interim Report, p.8). It is therefore highly desirable, before ground rules are laid, to consult and work with local structures on the possibly adverse effects of some of the clauses in those binding legal agreements (for example, a very restrictive definition of the alumni target group, the limited duration of the contract, or complex copyright, license and sublicense agreements : see below).
  - **Names and logos:** the Work Group has identified « potential concerns » which must naturally be addressed. Yet we believe the local alumni structures, established or being formed, need urgent clarification as to what may appear as a frivolous matter, but is really a drag on daily operations (creating local websites, printing stationary, sharing common blogs, etc.). Not to mention the cacophony created by this patchwork of visual identities by alumni groups that cannot legally use the AFS Alumni name and logo, and have to resort to oblique, sometimes confusing denominations and logos, when their sole purpose is to strongly support and promote the AFS vision.

For the record: AFS Alumni DK suggested that Birgitta My Anttila might become a member of the WG along with Maximilien Marxer. Her CV has been forwarded.

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## Issues for 2016 : Goals and objectives for Alumni with a Purpose

### I - Work with alumni structures worldwide

#### 1) Clarify common objectives, rules and procedures

This becomes more pressing as we'll be working with more alumni structures worldwide.

The online blog that will be up and running ASAP will tremendously contribute to the transparency and efficiency of the process. It will include our goals and objectives, our agenda and a « Who does what » section that will also clarify how we concretely work together, so as to facilitate the integration of new partners. Maximilien Marxer is the coordinator with the Board of Trustees and the Work Group for the European region. He is in charge of the bottom-up process, i.e. voicing alumni groups' proposals and concerns to the WG, then giving feedback to members.

#### 2) Identify and enlist potential alumni associate groups: the cross-fertilization process

We have **a lot to share with**, and learn from, alumni groups that have long operated in close association with a Partner organization, AFS Alumni DK being a prime example, or those that are operated by a Partner organization, for example AFS Germany and AFS USA, or that have been working independently, such as Le Cercle des Amis AFS. It is a two-way street: we share our experience and listen to alumni groups that have also found solutions that we may creatively adapt to our domestic context.

Who will contact whom shortly in our regional backyard, to start with ?

- Germany : Françoise Szigeti and Olivier Vuillod
- Sweden : Bruno Poisson
- Ireland: Kirsten M. Anttila
- Belgium: Birgitta Anttila (My), Klaus Faartoft
- Switzerland and Austria : Maximilien Marxer
- The Netherlands : Françoise Perraud
- Italy : Paolo Rossi

Farther away, Brazil: Michèle Toussaint, and Japan: Michèle Ruffat.

And, of course, we'll follow up with enthusiasm on how things develop in Indonesia with Avanti.

#### 3) Develop content-oriented domestic and regional projects

The idea here is to be at the same time realistic and ambitious:

- Realistic, because we have limited financial, human and time resources,
- Ambitious, because we can leverage the tremendous accumulated intellectual experience of our alumni, if we engage them with a purpose.

Beyond our traditional scholarship initiatives, our group wishes to set up work groups on the following subjects:



- **Mentoring and professional networking:** the French alumni have already organized several workshops for young AFS returnees seeking advice on educational and/or career orientation. Since many alumni work in regional or international companies/organizations and/or are based abroad, it seems like a good idea to go through domestic alumni groups to identify them in the databases and help them reunite and network locally. The WoCa could become an essential tool here.
- **Organize an annual colloquium/seminar « with substance » on a global theme linked to the AFS vision and mission**, such as :
  - Global citizenship
  - Education to peace
  - ...

Work on the « Global Citizenship project », as well as the « Education to peace » project, are still in the outline stage and have to be fleshed out in details. Birgitta My Anttila and Michel Antoine have volunteered to jointly arrange **a colloquium on the theme of Global Citizenship at our next seminar in September 2016.**

It would enlist a limited number of participants (20-30) from alumni sister organizations competent in the studied field, with external experts as well;

-- Within a definite time framework (half a day ? whole day?) ;

-- With subsequent publication of the conference proceedings.

There is a definite possibility that we may benefit from some European funding or other source of funding, as these themes are of vital importance to concerned organizations in our troubled times.

This type of public event would highlight how our AFS experience has contributed to shaping our life choices. It would also help us identify what AFS alumni would concretely bring to such a joint project. It would also be a great opportunity for press coverage and publicity for AFS, helping Partner organizations detect potential AFSers and host families, as well as keep government support.

It must be noted that the « Refugee Project » is currently being studied at the initiative of AFS-VSF, the French Partner organization. The AFS Alumni DK has already organized (in cooperation with other NGO's) a day conference on refugees with over 100 participants in January 2015. Cross-cultural activities involving host populations and refugees seem central for achieving one of the primary visions of AFS, achieving peace by walking and talking together.

It therefore appears that European AFS organisations could leverage the intercultural/communication skills of their members to help refugees who have arrived by the hundreds of thousands in Europe and are in dire need of support regarding their integration. Alumni of all ages and occupations can certainly commit their individual talents to help in what is currently the most urgent Peace project of all, totally in line with the ultimate mission of AFS.

## **II - Support and promote the AFS vision worldwide**

### – **The World Café**

Whatever we do, as on the ground alumni organizations, must ultimately benefit the WoCa and make it a truly efficient global tool (see above). Our spirit is « Think global, act local ». « Use it or lose it » (as presented in the WG Interim Report) is not an option.



– **Organize an alumni event during the next World Congress**

To keep spirits up in the wake of the Centennial Returnee Day, we would love to have a bi-annual gathering of alumni when and where the next World Congress meets. We commit to set up and run a separate workshop on alumni structures to share experiences, views and long-term vision. We wish we can get the full moral support of AFS International for this event, which would be quite in line with its own strategic vision and mission.

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**Next seminar in 2016 :**

**either September 24-25 or October 1-2,**

depending on which date is most appropriate with sister alumni structures.

**Location** to be determined.