



**SCHOOL OF INFORMATION**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



# MADS Degree Student Engagement

CASE Award submission abstract



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**TITLE OF ENTRY**

University of Michigan School of Information  
MADS Degree Student Engagement

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**CATEGORY TITLE**

**Alumni Relations: Targeted Constituency Engagement** — Entries should be an initiative that successfully increased the engagement of a specific constituency, such as students or parents, or alumni of a specific era, class, major, geographic area or demographic. Engagement results should be noteworthy and measurable, and can include event participation, volunteering for a specific cause or community event, fundraising, as well as other meaningful activities.

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**INSTITUTION**

University of Michigan, School of Information

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**NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUAL SUBMITTING ENTRY****Greg Powell**

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**NAMES OF ALL INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENTRY**

**Lily Wang**, Development Associate  
**Greg Powell**, Development Associate  
**Rebecca Pagels**, Executive Director of Development & Alumni Relations



## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ENTRY

The Master of Applied Data Science (MADS) program was launched in the fall of 2019 at the University of Michigan's School of Information (UMSI). This degree is fully online and teaches comprehensive applied data science at the intersection of people and technology. The MADS program offers a world-class education, and UMSI aims to extend that world-class experience to a lifelong relationship with alumni of this program.

With the goal of engaging our online learners as future alumni and donors, the UMSI Development & Alumni Relations Office launched an initiative connecting alumni of the school with incoming MADS students. Engagement between alumni and online students included alumni sending welcome emails, virtual and in-person 1:1 chats, and in-person and virtual happy hours. This engagement program creates meaningful ties connecting our online students back to the university and school and fosters affinity and loyalty to their future alma mater.



*I knew that working full-time at a brand-new job while going back to school was not going to be easy. I came across an advertisement for the MADS program while I was searching for and comparing potential master's programs. The big draw of this program was that it was an online program for students with diverse educational backgrounds.*

**Jenna Mekled ('21)**  
on the appeal of the MADS degree

## METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY

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- **Benchmarking with peer institutions and programs to identify current engagement strategies with online students and solicitation strategy for online students and alumni**
  - **Coursera welcome video with UMSI Dean's External Advisory Board members**
  - **2019 regional happy hours with students, alumni, dean and faculty**
  - **2019 virtual and in-person coffee chats**
  - **2019 and 2020 alumni welcome emails**
  - **2020 virtual happy hours for MADS students**
  - **Planned solicitation of MADS students, December 2020**
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### Welcome email from UMSI alumna to admitted MADS student

Dear MADS student,

On behalf of UMSI, I want to welcome you to the U-M School of Information! Congratulations on your admission — the University of Michigan is a leader among universities across the world, and the School of Information is globally recognized for its pioneering programs.

My name is Ella Meng, Master of Health Informatics class of 2017. I'm currently working in Sacramento, CA as a Research Data Analyst at California Department of Social Services. The skills and knowledge that I learned at the School of Information and the School of Public Health helped me secure my position and still play a role in my life today.

At UMSI, you'll learn from some of the brightest minds in the data science field. I encourage you to go blue. UMich is home to the leaders and the best, and I am confident in your success as a Wolverine.

Best of luck,  
Ella

## DOCUMENTED RESULTS, MEASUREMENTS OF EFFECTIVENESS

**The MADS engagement program engages online students with UMSI alumni to increase affinity for the school.** Additionally it engages alumni as volunteers. The long-term goal of this engagement is to cultivate alumni of the online and residential program as donors and supporters of the school. These goals were developed based on the following: online students typically will not come to Ann Arbor, are typically already working while attending the program, and frequently have tuition paid for by companies. Within the current student populations, many of them already have capacity to give. The program seeks to build affinity to support future gift conversations.

### **Objectives of the program are as follows:**

- Welcome emails to admitted and accepted online students from alumni
- 1:1 connections between alumni and online students that lead to virtual and in-person meetings
- Virtual happy hours for alumni and online students to further support connections between these two constituencies
- Happy hours for online students hosted by the development office to demonstrate to these students the intention of lifelong engagement
- Solicitation of gifts from current online students and identification of prospects and volunteers from this program (December 2020)

### **Objectives are measured in the following ways:**

- Number of alumni who volunteer to connect with MADS students
- Number of students who engage with alumni in 1:1 conversations
- Attendance at events

## DOCUMENTED RESULTS, MEASUREMENTS OF EFFECTIVENESS

To date (now in year two of the MADS program), **53 UMSI alumni** volunteers (current alumni population is approximately 8,000) have connected with MADS students via welcome emails and 1:1 conversations. 30 MADS students have requested to meet and speak with alumni through in-person and virtual conversations.

In 2019, attendance at regional events was as follows:

**Detroit, MI - 27 RSVPs, 18 attendees**  
**Ann Arbor, MI - 45 RSVPs, 32 attendees**  
**Chicago, IL - 17 RSVPs, 12 attendees**

Notably, Chicago had a 100% RSVP response rate and attendance from MADS students. Additionally, the Chicago event was hosted by a UMSI volunteer board member, and the development staff member who manages that relationship attended and co-hosted the event. Students also had the opportunity to meet UMSI Dean Thomas Finholt at the Ann Arbor event.

Upcoming activities include the following:

Virtual event for 2019 cohort, **27 RSVPs** out of 186 current students (14.5% response rate)  
Virtual event for 2020 cohort, **60 RSVPs** out of 287 current students (20.9% response rate)  
Opening of a MADS program fund for December 2020 solicitation (Giving Tuesday solicitation with a combination of emails and messaging on the MADS slack channel)

Since the online degree program launched in fall 2019, MADS students have actively engaged with alumni and participated in events offered through the development and alumni relations office. Additionally, **seven MADS students have made gifts** since the degree was launched and **more than 50 alumni** have volunteered to connect with students, **46 of whom are donors and 17 who made gifts** following engagement with online students.

## TOTAL NUMBER OF PROFESSIONAL AND SUPPORT STAFF WHO WORKED ON THE PROGRAM

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**Professional staff:** 1

**Lily Wang**, Development Associate

**Interns:** 2 Development Summer Internship Program participants

**1-2 staff** for each in-person happy hour

## PROGRAM BUDGET AND UNIT COSTS WHERE APPLICABLE

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*“Getting on calls with people from different career backgrounds and locations was nice, because we were able to talk about things beyond assignments – common interests and goals.”*



**Ayansola S. Akanmu** ('21)

On the opportunity for open communication with the diverse enrollees in the MADS program

**Total:** \$1,456

\$655 for Detroit happy hour, 2019 (food & beverage, venue reservation, mileage)

\$603 for Ann Arbor happy hour, 2019 (catering, beverage, flowers)

\$198 for Chicago happy hour, 2019 (food & beverage)

\$0 for 2 virtual happy hours, 2 staff and 2 faculty, 2020

\$0 for Giving Tuesday solicitations, 2020