THE YALE AIDS MEMORIAL PROJECT
A STUDY IN COLLABORATION

AMBASSADORS IN ACTION: AN AYA CASE STUDY
THE ASSOCIATION OF YALE ALUMNI

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WEBSITE

www.yamp.org/

MISSION

The Yale AIDS Memorial Project (YAMP) is an alumni-led initiative to honor and document the lives of hundreds of men and women from the University who perished during the AIDS epidemic. YAMP will pay homage to the deceased – students, faculty and staff – by creating profiles with their biographies and photos, along with stories from their friends and family. By telling the story of AIDS through the lens of a single institution, YAMP will make the epidemic palpable for a younger generation and help to stimulate an AIDS memory boom.

GOALS

1. The memorial goal: to provide an online space for communities to mourn the deaths and celebrate the loves of affiliates lost to AIDS

2. The narrative goal: to tell the story of the epidemic to a national audience and to convey its incredible scope by tracing its impact on a single institution.

3. The archival goal: to build an archive of primary source material to help historians reconstruct the history of the plague before it fades from memory

4. The public health goal: to help prevent the virus from spreading by educating current and future students about HIV/AIDS
5. **The technological goal:** to demonstrate the role technology can play in elucidating and memorializing the past

**BACKGROUND:**

A recent gay alum, Chris Glazek ’09, realized how uninformed he was during a Yale alumni event in New York City while he was talking to another alum who had lost a classmate to AIDS in the 1980’s. He was shocked at how little he understood about the impact of AIDS on the gay community – he grew up in a time when schools only approached AIDS in terms of Africa. After researching the devastating impact AIDS had on the US gay community, he set out to develop a way to help people of his generation understand. After speaking to faculty and alumni, Chris decided the best way to accomplish his goal would be to create an online memorial for Yalies who died of AIDS. Chris put together a team of young alumni and recruited a board of directors to make his vision a reality.

**THE DILEMMAS:**

Though Chris was able to put together a great team and board, there were several difficult issues that needed to be solved:

1. Find the names of Yale alumni, faculty and staff who died of AIDS: For the most part, the University does not keep records of those who died of AIDS; complicating matters further, many families were afraid of the stigma and often did not indicate the actual cause of death in obituaries.

2. Create profiles that are respectful and accomplish the goals: The profiles take a great deal of time to create – how do you motivate the volunteers to spend the necessary time to create a proper profile?

3. Raise the money needed: In order to develop an effective website and ensure its long-term viability, a significant amount of money needs to be raised for operating expenses and an endowment.

**THE SOLUTION**

In order to locate the names of those who died, it was necessary to build a coalition of various alumni and alumni groups to help get the word out. YAMP currently is working with the AYA, Yale GALA (Gay and Lesbian Alliance), YAANY Yale Alumni Association of New York), YBAA (Yale Black Alumni Association), YaleWomen, YLAA (Yale Latino Alumni Association), and AAAYA (Association of Asian American Yale Alumni) to get the word out to their members about sending in names of fellow alumni. In addition, YAMP worked with various Yale college classes and Yale GALA during reunion weekends to present the project and spread the word. To date, YAMP has 200 names of Yale alumni.

YAMP looked to the models of student publications to create a group of student and young alumni to develop the profiles. There are 20 volunteers who are dedicated to spending the necessary time to create appropriate profiles.

YAMP initially reached out to Yale’s LGBT alumni community through Yale GALA and Yale’s LGBT Studies department to raise the seed funding to get the website designed and launched. Once this was done, YAMP recruited the various alumni organizations to cohost a successful launch event/fund raiser at Christie’s NYC featuring President Peter Salovey, University Chaplain Sharon Kugler, and Christie’s Americas Chair, Marc Porter LAW ’87. The event raised $50,000 in individual and corporate donations and has opened the door to funding from family foundations.

**THE FUTURE**
The YAMP team has created a meaningful website through collaboration with Yale University departments, faculty, students, and various alumni groups. The YAMP is an ongoing project and we continue to collect names, develop profiles and raise money. Many challenges remain, including the difficulty we have in collecting names of staff members (YAMP has recruited the assistance of the Yale Chaplain’s office and Yale’s HR department to facilitate this), the length of time it takes to create a profile and the limited number of volunteers, and the need for more funding. YAMP is looking to host many more events with as many alumni groups that are willing to host them. Once the Yale memorial is secure, YAMP hopes to bring this model to other universities.