Expanding Networks to Opportunity with Protopia

Capturing the Benefits of Student-Alumni Connections

Emily Streeper, PhD
Anudhi Mungasinghe, PhD
Betheny Gross, PhD

March 2023
Executive Summary

Creating Connections Through Questions: Alumni-Student Collaboration AI Impacts Social Networks and Opportunities

As students transition through college and into careers, they often rely on their social connections to provide support and wisdom in navigating their entrance into the workforce. Social connections, even when they are secondary or weak ties, can improve professional outcomes such as securing a job, earning promotions and salary raises, and improving career satisfaction. These social networks can be even more important for students from underrepresented demographic groups, who often have fewer ties to individuals who can open doors to professional opportunities. As illuminated in our study, students have many questions about their future careers, and they are seeking the answers from professionals in their fields of interest.

Networking solutions like Protopia aim to make it easy for students seeking guidance to connect with alumni who want to help them. Specifically, Protopia, an artificial intelligence (AI) technology, makes strategic connections between students and alumni by efficiently matching students with particular questions to the relevant alumni who can answer them.
Protopia worked with WGU Labs to examine students’ and alumni’s use of Protopia across three U.S. institutions. This included examining user characteristics, users’ motivations for using Protopia, and the impact Protopia had on users’ social networks. By better understanding Protopia users’ experiences and engagement with the AI, this work illuminated the role Protopia plays in students’ and alumni’s social networks. The following report outlines the findings from our multimethod study.

Our team conducted a secondary analysis of over 1,000 questions submitted to Protopia and more than 4,000 alumni responses from 2019 to 2022, as well as the demographic information of the alumni who responded to Protopia questions. We also conducted a survey in the summer and fall of 2022 which included responses from 246 Protopia users. Finally, in fall 2022, we interviewed 17 Protopia users to develop a deeper understanding of users’ motivations for using Protopia and their feedback on the AI.

We found that:

- **Alumni were ready to help**
  From 2019 to 2022, alumni from the three institutions examined in this study provided over 4,000 responses to questions submitted to Protopia. Only about 13% of the 1,000+ questions posted by students went unanswered. Of the questions that received responses, more than half (59%) received multiple alumni responses.

- **Protopia served as a career-building resource**
  When asked to select all the reasons why they submitted a question to Protopia, 76% of survey respondents indicated it was to ask about “career or other after-graduation topics.” Additionally, 71% of survey respondents indicated they were somewhat or extremely likely to seek advice through Protopia when facing professional challenges like finding a job or internship, preparing for an interview, or negotiating their salary. Across the Protopia usage data, questions were overwhelmingly related to career-related topics.

- **Connections between students and alumni could be more impactful**
  Only 29% of survey respondents indicated they continued communicating with an alum who responded to their question. Of these respondents, over
half (56%) interacted with an alum two or three times after their initial exchange through Protopia, while only 15% interacted with them more than three additional times.

• **Protopia has the potential to open new opportunities**
  Forty-two percent of survey respondents indicated Protopia helped them make new professional connections, and the majority of survey respondents (64%) indicated they would feel comfortable directly contacting alumni they met through Protopia to ask advice on professional subjects. While not the typical experience, some users even found real-life opportunities through the alumni they connected with through Protopia.

While users demonstrated an overall high satisfaction with Protopia, this work also revealed some areas of growth. Institutions implementing Protopia can get the most out of the solution by ensuring the visibility and understanding of Protopia as an available tool to students, providing students and alumni with guidance for engagement, and encouraging students who may be hesitant about accessing the alumni network.

Building an extensive network of individuals that span different organizations, geographies, and even industries can be a resource that pays dividends in good advice and opening doors. Overall, Protopia stands to fill the gap between highly personalized but limited mentoring relationships, and highly diverse but shallow connections via Google or LinkedIn. With additional development, technologies like Protopia can help to bridge the gap between students seeking connections and alumni who want to give back.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to thank the many students and alumni at three participant institutions who generously offered their time and experiences in surveys and interviews and our partners at Protopia for recruiting our participants and making their data transparent and available for analysis.
Alumni are a potentially powerful but often under-utilized resource for universities and their students. For current students, alumni can serve as guides for navigating their academic journeys, finding opportunities beyond the classroom, and helping them transition from college to a career. These social connections, whether in the form of mentorship or informal social ties (often called secondary or weak ties in literature), can improve professional outcomes such as securing a job, earning promotions and salary raises, and improving career satisfaction. Connections made through alumni can be even more important for students from underrepresented demographic groups who often have fewer ties to individuals who can open doors to professional opportunities.

Increasingly, colleges and universities are turning to technology solutions as they look for innovative ways to build meaningful connections between current students and alumni.

Protopia, an artificial intelligence (AI) technology, is one such example. Protopia aims to spark connections between students and alumni by efficiently pairing students who have questions with alumni who can answer them.

This research study aimed to better understand students’ and alumni’s use of Protopia by examining the characteristics of users, how and why they used Protopia, and how their engagement with Protopia impacted their social networks.
Through a set of interviews with Protopia users, a survey of student users, as well as usage data collected directly from Protopia, we explored who used Protopia, as well as how and to what extent Protopia expanded students’ networks, and showed the potential to improve students’ access to new opportunities — especially those of minority backgrounds and/or with limited social network/capital.

We found that:

- Many alumni were eager to support students at their alma mater.
- A diverse community of students valued Protopia as a career-building resource.
- While most Protopia connections remained formative, many students believed they could call on these connections again as their careers advanced.
- For a few students, the connections opened new opportunities in the form of referrals and mentorships and expanded their networks.
- With more direction to both alumni and student participants, opportunities like these could be more common through this AI technology.

Institutions implementing Protopia can get the most out of the solution by ensuring the visibility and understanding of Protopia as an available tool to students, providing students and alumni with guidance for engagement, and encouraging students who may be hesitant about accessing the alumni network.

The Protopia solution: New connections delivered to your inbox

Protopia’s AI technology enables students to network with alumni of their college without the need to install and learn a new platform or app. The Protopia technology (a) removes barriers between students who ask for help and alumni willing to offer assistance and (b) uses AI to make strategic connections between those seeking and those offering assistance by connecting students with relevant alumni.

Through this student-alumni pairing, Protopia hopes to facilitate matches that will provide answers to students’ immediate questions and serve as the initial connection in a relationship that students can return to at different points in their career building. By enabling these connections, Protopia aims to improve
students’ social capital and sense of belonging at their institution, as well as alumni’s long-term personal and financial investment in their alma mater (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  Protopia theory of change

---

**How Protopia works**

To submit a question to alumni, users fill out a submission form where they provide background on themselves and outline their question. Protopia’s AI then sends the question to alumni who seem most equipped to answer it due to their experience, availability, location, engagement in alumni activities, and other factors.

The selected alum receives the question in an email from Protopia, which they can choose to answer or decline to answer. If the alum declines to answer, the AI searches for the next most relevant alum and sends the question to them. When an alum answers the question, their answer is emailed to the user who submitted the question.

Once their question is answered, Protopia prompts the user to send a thank-you email to the alum who answered their question. By encouraging users to continue their interaction with alumni, Protopia hopes to develop a deeper connection between the user and the alum. The ultimate goal of these interactions is to grow users’ connections with alumni and expand their professional networks.
This study used a multimethod approach to examine Protopia.

First, we conducted a secondary analysis on Protopia’s user data collected from three large U.S. universities from 2019 to 2022. This data included the subject and content of 1,039 questions submitted to Protopia. It also included the content of 4,053 alumni responses to the questions. We categorized alumni responses as either successful (e.g., when an alum provided advice or an opportunity to discuss the topic further) or unsuccessful (e.g., when an alum declined to respond or did not provide any response). The data also included the gender and race/ethnicity of alumni from all three institutions who answered questions through Protopia and citizenship of one institution’s alumni responders. The secondary analysis sought to better understand who used Protopia and the nature of interactions between students and alumni through Protopia.

Second, we conducted a survey of Protopia student-users from the same three large universities and who submitted a question or request. Across the three schools, 246 student-users participated in this survey. Protopia recruited their users to participate through recruitment emails. To ensure respondents had used Protopia as students, we included a screening question at the start of the survey. To continue the survey, respondents had to indicate they had submitted a question to the Protopia-powered program at their institution as a student.

Finally, we conducted 17 interviews with Protopia users from one of the three universities. Seven of these interviewees had also participated in the surveys. Fourteen of these interviewees had submitted questions to Protopia as students at their university, and two interviewees submitted questions as alumni. One interviewee submitted questions as both a student and again as an alum. During these interviews, we asked students about their motivations for using Protopia and what their experiences using and engaging with alumni through Protopia were like.
It is important to note that the data primarily represents Protopia users from one of the three institutions. Users from this institution submitted 65% of the questions Protopia received in the usage data provided. Students from this institution also accounted for 70% of the survey responses, and we exclusively interviewed users from this university.
Protopia provided a diverse community of students a convenient way to find connections

Over three years of adoption, hundreds of students have reached out to alumni through Protopia. Our survey sample, while not completely reflective of the demographic makeup of students from the three universities, demonstrated that Protopia has served a somewhat diverse population of students from these three institutions (see Appendix). Compared to enrollment rates at the institutions, our survey sample generally underrepresented male students, Hispanic and/or Latino/a students, and Black and/or African American students while overrepresenting Asian or Asian American students. Additionally, the demographic data of the alumni of these institutions who responded to questions from 2019 to 2022 were also not fully representative of the demographic makeup of students from their institutions. Compared to their institutions, female alumni and Hispanic and/or Latino/a alumni were generally underrepresented in the alumni Protopia responders while white and Asian or Asian American alumni were overrepresented.

Most users valued Protopia and would recommend it to others

Overall, those who used the AI technology as students found Protopia to be an effective tool and a valuable additional resource. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents agreed it was clear to them how to effectively use Protopia. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents agreed they would recommend Protopia to a fellow student. Sixty-four percent agreed they would use Protopia again in the future (see Figure 2).
Some users who submitted questions to Protopia suggested modest technical improvements, such as the ability to see previous questions that they had submitted as well as the thread of the current submission and the responses that it had received.

A small number of interview respondents expected Protopia to work like popular social network apps (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and expected to interact with a dedicated downloaded application or website. Protopia, however, manages all
of the communication between students and alumni through emails and texts, avoiding the need for another app. These users expressed frustration with being required to access the website to view whether they had received responses and mentioned wishing that Protopia had an app that would send them notifications to their phone whenever they received responses. This confusion, while understandable, suggests that communication about how to use Protopia could be improved.

**Students reached out to Protopia for career guidance and found the ‘sweet spot’ in personalization and feedback**

Students submitted a wide range of questions, but the vast majority of the questions were related to career exploration, preparation, or navigation. Students rarely thought of Protopia as a resource for academic help or for advice on personal challenges.

When we asked survey respondents to select all the reasons for why they submitted a question to Protopia, an overwhelming majority of the reasons chosen were “career or other after-graduation topics.” Additionally, 71% of survey respondents also indicated they were somewhat or extremely likely to seek advice through Protopia when facing professional challenges like finding a job or internship, preparing for an interview, or negotiating their salary (see Figure 3).
Across the three institutions, 79% of the submitted questions contained a career-related question, whereas 25% of the submissions contained an academic-related question. Through interviews, we learned that students thought Protopia connections could help them find an internship or job, receive advice on a career track they were considering, or learn about the life experiences of alumni who work in their field of interest. Our review of submitted questions revealed that students used Protopia for help with both present (e.g., seeking an immediate answer with a current problem) and future (e.g., seeking advice on a challenge they anticipate facing in the future) career-focused questions in nearly equal measure.

Overwhelmingly, students wanted to connect with alumni who shared their career interests and have knowledge about their career of interest. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents indicated it was very or extremely important that the alumni they connected with through Protopia share their career interests/knowledge (see Figure 4). Students considered shared life experience, geographic location, and interest in the same topics to be less important comparatively.
Our interviews revealed a similar theme. The majority of interviewees noted they used Protopia to connect with alumni who shared their career interests and could talk about their life experiences with the interviewee. They also wanted to connect with these alumni to seek personal and knowledgeable advice rather than surface-level answers users could find online.

Protopia was one of several different resources students relied on, but it seemed to fill a distinct role for students. For personal and academic support, students sought out resources that were close to them and with whom they had a shared personal or academic experience. Often, these resources were friends, family, roommates, classmates, professors, or other people close to the student. For career support, students relied on a more diverse set of resources. For some questions
or challenges, students described seeking support from one-on-one mentors or advisors. This type of resource provides a highly personalized perspective and targeted advice; however, it is limited to that one person’s experiences and advice. In other cases, students described using Google or LinkedIn to search for answers or guidance. Broad searches are a rich tool which can provide many possible solutions and perspectives, but it is impersonal and may not always lead to a successful interaction or provide useful information for individual situations.

Protopia sits between these extremes by offering input from people who share some common experiences with the student by virtue of being alumni from the same institution. It also offers the potential for multiple alumni perspectives with diverse life and career experiences. Over half of the interviewees said a motivation for using Protopia was knowing they would be connected to alumni who students believed would be more likely to respond to their questions than strangers on platforms like LinkedIn. Over half of the interviewees mentioned they turned to Protopia because it gave them access to a broader network of individuals in a field they were interested in.

An important consideration for Protopia and other similar social technologies is how to maximize the value of this in-between space. One way to do this would be coaching alumni on how to provide impactful responses to students. Another approach would be to provide as many alumni responses to each question as possible.

**Protopia exchanges were often short but helped students build a bank of contacts for the future**

The Protopia team wants to help students expand their social networks and bridge social divides. Evidence from Protopia shows that many alumni are willing to be those bridges. Across the three institutions, only about 13% of the more
than 1,000 questions posted by students went unanswered. Of the questions that received responses, more than half (59%) received multiple responses.

Though most questions received a response, survey and interview data showed that many of the connections remained formative. For example, only 29% of survey respondents indicated that they continued communicating with an alum who responded to their question. Of these respondents, most (56%) interacted with an alum two or three times after their initial exchange through Protopia, while 15% interacted with them more than three additional times (see Figure 5).

Users we interviewed described similar levels of interaction — some interviewees reported interacting with Protopia alumni only once after their initial exchange, while just under half of the interviewees reported interacting with Protopia alumni an additional two to three times after their first exchange. In a handful of these cases, respondents noted that their alumni helpfully guided them through an issue they were facing, though their contact ended after the issue was resolved.

**Figure 5  Frequency of continued communication after initial exchange through Protopia**

How frequently have you interacted with the Protopia alumni after your initial exchange through the platform?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two or three times</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than three times</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several possible reasons the connections remained limited. Some interviewees mentioned concern or nervousness about reaching out to alumni on Protopia or following up with an alum who had already helped them. They
expressed a fear of imposing on alumni or disrupting their busy schedules. Additionally, of the survey respondents who did not continue communicating with alumni they met through Protopia, 27% were unsure whether the alum would want to connect again. However, 64% of overall survey respondents agreed they felt comfortable directly contacting alumni they connected with through Protopia for advice on professional subjects giving them the potential to get more out of using the AI.

Another possibility is the nature of some responses limited the chance that students would engage beyond the initial question. In some cases, answers to their questions may have come too late to be useful. Eighteen percent of survey respondents indicated alumni did not respond to their questions quickly, and some interviewees indicated they felt response times were unpredictable and, at times, lengthy. In other cases, responses were generic and offered little more than students could find online themselves. For example, a few interviewees mentioned receiving responses they could have found through an online search, like a list of general interviewing tips. Others mentioned the alum retelling their life experience with little advice on how the student might make this information actionable. Users often want personalized advice or a deeper conversation.

Still in other cases, the responses were too open-ended such as alumni simply responding, “Give me a call.” Finally, while not common, some students didn’t have their questions answered at all, preventing any connection with alumni. Eighteen percent of survey respondents indicated they submitted a question that was not responded to by any alumni, and some interviewees reported that at least one of the questions they submitted to Protopia went unanswered.

These challenges notwithstanding, Protopia met the goal of expanding the boundaries of many students’ social networks. Forty-two percent of survey respondents indicated Protopia helped them make new professional connections. Over half of the interviewees mentioned feeling comfortable going back to the alumni they interacted with if they came across a relevant question in the future. Furthermore, 64% of survey respondents indicated they would feel comfortable directly contacting alumni they connected with through Protopia to ask advice on professional subjects (Figure 6).
Engaged adopters showed the promise and potential of Protopia and other connection technologies

In a few cases, Protopia did generate stronger connections and new opportunities. These cases show the potential value of fostering student-alumni connections. Thirty percent of survey respondents reported they considered at least one of the alumni they connected with through Protopia to be an informal mentor. These students, by and large, were happy with these connections (see Figure 7). One interviewee discussed finding an alum through Protopia who became a long-term mentor, and just under half of the interviewees found short-term mentors who helped them with a challenge they faced.
Among survey respondents who continued to communicate with their alumni connections, 73% said they plan to interact with alumni in the future. Over half of the interviewees who had an alum respond to them mentioned being willing to contact them again in the future.

Even if students did not form a long-lasting relationship with an alum, alumni still provided indispensable insight and guidance to many students. Over half of the interviewees who engaged with alumni found the alumni to be sincere and helpful in offering an honest view of their industries.

Figure 7  Feedback on mentors found through Protopia

Think about the mentor(s) you have found through the Protopia platform. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I am satisfied with my Protopia platform mentor(s).
- My Protopia platform mentor(s) has been effective in providing me with guidance and advice.
- The quality of mentorship I receive from my Protopia mentor is high.
- My Protopia platform mentor(s) likely considers me a mentee.
- My Protopia platform mentor(s) does not meet my needs.

Among survey respondents who continued to communicate with their alumni connections, 73% said they plan to interact with alumni in the future. Over half of the interviewees who had an alum respond to them mentioned being willing to contact them again in the future.

Even if students did not form a long-lasting relationship with an alum, alumni still provided indispensable insight and guidance to many students. Over half of the interviewees who engaged with alumni found the alumni to be sincere and helpful in offering an honest view of their industries.
While the majority of interviewees who connected with an alum mentioned receiving advice, a fresh perspective, and/or excerpts of personal experience from alumni, two interviewees also received access to new real-life opportunities. One interviewee received a referral for a job in their alum's company that led to a job interview. Another student was told by their alum that if they were unable to find an internship opportunity for the summer, they would refer them to their colleagues and help them find a summer internship. These examples, though not necessarily the typical experience, show the potential that technologies that forge connections, like Protopia, can offer to students.

Recommendations to yield the most out of connection technologies

The following recommendations are based on this study’s findings from engaged adopters’ experiences. Three strategies that will help universities get more out of Protopia stood out: first, increasing students’ awareness and understanding of Protopia’s value; second, providing students and alumni guidance on how to engage with Protopia; and third, explicitly encouraging students who may be hesitant to try Protopia.

Our interviews indicated that institutional messaging about Protopia can have significant effects on usage. Most of the interviewees heard about Protopia via email from either their alumni association or their career center. For these Protopia users, knowing about Protopia early in their academic career was helpful — some used it early on in their first or second year of college while others kept Protopia in their back pocket until they needed it. A handful of interviewees indicated they heard about Protopia through word of mouth (e.g., an academic advisor, a professor, a friend) or from browsing the institutional website. In these cases,
they were often seeking advice about a specific question or situation. Many interviewees thought Protopia needed more visibility among students and/or that Protopia could benefit from being associated with other high-visibility college resources, such as Handshake and the Career Services Center. Making sure students are aware they have access to tools like Protopia before they need them can be a useful support to students beyond their traditional college resources.

Additionally, institutional leaders should emphasize Protopia’s role as a technology that allows students to connect with a broad group of professionals who are more likely to respond due to their shared college background and personal investment in their alma mater. Some interviewees indicated that they felt like Protopia was more of a Q&A platform rather than a technology that enables students to meet potential mentors. One interviewee even mentioned that they thought that Protopia discouraged or did not allow students to follow up with the alumni who responded to them. While this is certainly not the case, it is clear that more explicit communication from institutional leaders on how to best utilize Protopia and its purpose would help students to strategically engage with Protopia as an effective career resource.

HELP STUDENTS GET THE MOST OUT OF NETWORKING WITH ALUMNI

Students would benefit from guidance on how to best engage with alumni. For example, a few users mentioned that guidelines for structuring questions and honing in on specific issues would be helpful to students who may not know where to start their request. Others highlighted the importance of knowing what to expect from alumni. Knowing what alumni can offer students, whether that is just advice or opportunities like internships, would help students know what is appropriate to ask of alumni. A few users mentioned feeling uncomfortable when alumni sent them large chunks of availability and asked them to call during one of those times. Better guidelines on how to handle these situations and how to connect with alumni before scheduling a phone or video call could be helpful at preventing students from disengaging with alumni. Finally, a couple users suggested having guidelines for students on how best to approach calls and meetings with alumni and advice on networking.
Some users also mentioned that they felt like alumni must be busy and used this as a reason for not pursuing further communication. This fear of imposing on alumni suggests that certain students may need extra clarity in understanding alumni’s motivations for being on Protopia as well as encouragement to engage with alumni through Protopia.

Users also had suggestions for the alumni responding to their questions. Some users mentioned that it would be helpful if alumni are told students might want referrals or internship opportunities but may feel uncomfortable asking for these favors. A few users also mentioned that it would be very helpful if they could know whether alumni, perhaps through a badge on their profile, were open for mentorship. Additionally, providing guidance to alumni on crafting effective responses to student questions may benefit both students and alumni.

Finally, Protopia emphasizes the importance of meeting alumni where they already are — email, text messaging, and social media sites. With constraints on the time and energy, minimizing the effort needed to meaningfully connect with students could help with alumni engagement. Universities may even explore ways to integrate connection points into courses, advising, or career services. In doing so, the institutions can help alumni find a way to give back to their alma maters in a manageable and impactful way for both alumni and students.
The takeaway

When it comes to social connections, more is more. Building an extensive network of individuals that spans different organizations, geographies, and even industries can become a resource that pays dividends in good advice and opening doors. University alumni are a tremendous and willing resource for students who are following in their footsteps. Protopia is an AI technology that aims to help build these networks by creating an easy way for students to reach out for the expertise and advice from their university’s alumni. To a meaningful extent, Protopia is achieving its goals and creating network connections with the potential to yield benefits to students well into the future. In the three institutions we studied, Protopia engaged a somewhat diverse, if not institutionally representative, population of students. Students reached out for and found career guidance that ranged from advice to requests for work opportunities, while a smaller percentage of students asked non-career-related questions, including what classes to take and facilities on campus premises. Though most connections remained short-term in nature, students generally found value in their connections. In a few cases, students and alumni sparked connections that helped students resolve an important challenge or even establish long-term mentoring relationships. These interactions demonstrate exciting promise for this AI technology.

Building an extensive network of individuals that spans different organizations, geographies, and even industries can become a resource that pays dividends in good advice and opening doors.
Overall, Protopia stands to fill the gap between formal mentoring, which is highly personalized but limited in perspective, and information found via Google or LinkedIn, which is highly diverse but yields shallow connections. Maximizing the potential of Protopia will hinge on the company and its partner institutions' abilities to effectively help students and alumni to make the most of Protopia.
Appendix

The diverse community of students and alumni connected through Protopia

Although Protopia does not collect student demographic information, we collected demographic information (race/ethnicity, gender, age, economic background, college generation status and parent education level, and current academic status) from survey respondents. Our survey sample was:

- mostly white (39%) or Asian or Asian American (36%; see Figure 8)
- mostly female (71% female)
- mostly young (median age = 22 years old)
- mostly current students (see Figure 9)
- mostly continuing generation students\(^\text{10}\) (66% continuing-generation students)

**Figure 8  Race/ethnicity of survey respondents**
Figure 9  Academic status of survey respondents

At the conclusion of your current academic term, how many credits will you have earned?

- I have graduated: 38.2%
- Senior status: 22.4%
- Junior status: 15.9%
- Sophomore status: 8.1%
- Not provided: 6.1%
- I am no longer a student: 5.7%
- Freshman status: 3.7%
- Not provided: 6.1%

Compared to the demographic makeup within their institutions, our survey sample overrepresented students who identified as female compared to enrollment rates at all three institutions. Our sample also underrepresented Hispanic and/or Latino/a students across all three institutions. Black and/or African American respondents were underrepresented in the sample compared to the enrollment rates of the university that was most represented in the data but were slightly overrepresented compared to the enrollment rates of one of the other universities. The sample overrepresented Asian or Asian American students relative to the enrollment rates of the most represented university in the data and one of the other two universities. Finally, the sample underrepresented white students compared to the enrollment rates of the university most represented in the data but approximately represented the enrollment rates of the other two
universities. As a reminder, we obtained this data from the users who participated in the survey, and therefore, whether this data represented the racial/ethnic makeup of all Protopia users is unknown.

Based on the demographic data of alumni users from the three institutions provided by Protopia, the alumni answering students’ questions from 2019 to 2022 were almost evenly divided between those identifying as male (49%) and female (41%) with 10% not providing their gender. In comparison to student demographic data from these three institutions, alumni identifying as male were overrepresented, and alumni identifying as female were underrepresented. Compared to the demographic makeup within their institutions, the race/ethnicity composition of alumni users from those institutions was similar. However, white and Asian or Asian American alumni were overrepresented compared to enrollment rates while Hispanic and/or Latino/a alumni were underrepresented (see Figure 10). Alumni users were generally older than student users (median age = 46 years old). Protopia also provided citizenship information for the alumni users of the most represented university in the data. Sixteen percent of these alumni users from 2019 to 2022 were international.

**Figure 10** Race/ethnicity of alumni Protopia users across three large universities from 2019 to 2022

- Asian or Asian American: 16%
- Black and/or African American: 6%
- Hispanic and/or Latino/a: 7%
- White: 71%
- Native American: 0%
References


10. Continuing generation students are those who indicated they are not the first in their families to attend a four-year university/institution within the United States.
Protopia is the leading donor activation platform for colleges and universities. Institutions like Denison, Duke, Michigan, NC State, Pitt and the London School of Economics use Protopia’s AI technology to make it easy and scalable for every alum to volunteer and help students and fellow graduates with advice and introductions.

WGU Labs is the nonprofit EdTech consulting, incubation, research, and design arm of Western Governors University, where our mission is to identify and support scalable solutions that address the biggest challenges in education today.