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Introducing ARC: Sutherland-Chan's First Alumni Relations Committee by Jennifer Schembri

In 1978, ten pioneers became the first Sutherland-Chan graduating class. Flash forward 39 years: the school has produced a community of nearly 3000 alumni who are doing amazing things in the world and are leaders in the profession. We decided there's no better time than the present to show alumni that they are an important part of Sutherland-Chan's history and also a valuable part of the school today – and so, the Alumni Relations Committee (ARC) was formed.



ARC founding members (l. to r.): Michelle, Grace, Matt and Jennifer

“Sutherland-Chan has graduated some of the top massage therapists in the field and we value our alumni,” says the committee’s inaugural chair, Michelle Francis-Smith ’01. “The school has in recent years created more offerings to serve and give back to our alumni, but wanted to do more and realized that a committee dedicated to this initiative would be most effective.”

ARC began with four members: Michelle, S-C co-founder Grace Chan, Student Services Coordinator Matthew Chu, and Admissions and Social Media Coordinator Jennifer Schembri. Matt has just recently rotated into the chair role and Sandra Walfisz ’16 is about to join this month.

Each member brings a unique perspective to the committee. “Over the years we have had minimal organized contact with our alumni,” says Grace Chan. “I may have seen them at conferences or at Con-Ed courses over the years but now, with the introduction of ARC, we will be better able to connect and reconnect with our alumni.”

As a recent grad, Matt Chu ’15 felt it was important to create ARC to assist alumni and give back. “We are a private career college that has made a great impact in the world of massage therapy and we recognize that there is a community out there that needs to be acknowledged.” For Matt, it is important that ARC provides quality resources to aid in the development of the RMT. “For any graduates who haven’t quite achieved as much as they hoped, the Alumni Relations Committee wants to become an important resource to assist those who are looking to hone their skills.”

Since its inception, ARC has been busy. First up was a summer fete – a BBQ mixer dubbed ‘Welcome to the Profession.’ We invited the classes of 2015 and 2016 to the U. of T. Faculty Club to reconnect with their peers and share their experiences. Despite the weather creating a bit of a damper, we received very positive feedback on this mixer – ARC can definitely say our first event was a success.

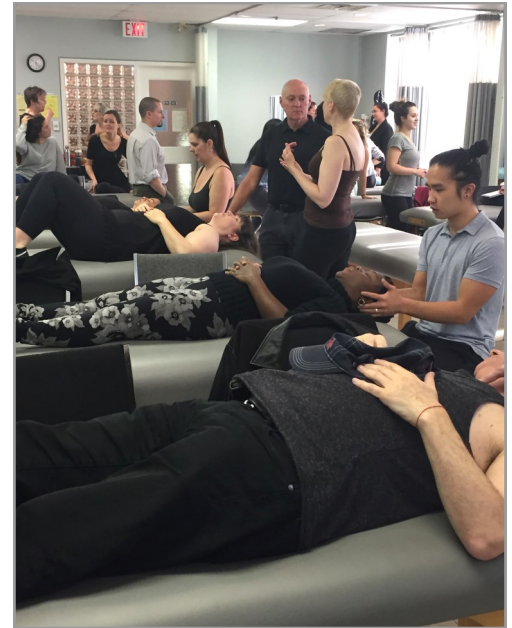
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And we didn't top there. We knew there would be a number of Sutherland-Chan grads present at the Canadian Massage Conference in October, so we decided to plan an event to capitalize on the out-of-town alumni who would be in attendance. The result was an ARC-hosted Meet & Greet that took place in a private room at the Alloro Restaurant in the Holiday Inn. Grace and Michelle mingled the night away with colleagues and former classmates.

On November 9, ARC held a free Master Class entitled "Re-Master the HNS Region." Open to the first 20 alumni who RSVP'd, we were at capacity less than an hour after the invite went out, and received more than 65 requests to attend – we increased the class size but still couldn't accommodate everyone. The class was taught by Grace Chan, Peter Becker '98 and Bruce McKinnon '90 and was very well received.

Beyond holding various types of events, ARC is committed to keeping our alumni informed, involved and invested in the alumni community and in the future of Sutherland-Chan. We recently reached out via an online survey that included more than 15 questions and garnered close to 100 responses. Through this feedback, we have gained valuable insights and are working on the areas we need to address and improve.

Though this is still the early stages of ARC, we intend to keep moving forward to foster stronger relationships with alumni and be better equipped and informed to support alumni needs. "In the next five years, I hope that the networking and mentorship events gain more buzz and increased attendance and that alumni recognize that massage therapy does not need to be a solo job," says Matt. Sutherland-Chan wants to be a bigger part of your future.



The master class

We value your input. To contact the Alumni Relations Committee call: 416.924.1107 x 20.

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