Describe your department's year.
The year was defined by growth and change. Many signature Alumni Relations programs like the Mentor Program, Bulldogs on the Block, Bulldogs Behind the Scenes, and alumni service days continued to expand recent program launches. Other historically popular programs and events like Bulldogs of the Last Decade (BOLD) and Homecoming were altered to better serve the needs and interests of alumni. In many ways, the work early in the year was overshadowed by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, and the subsequent shifts in how the department works, and what the department delivers to alumni.

Summarize the impact of COVID-19 on your unit’s operations.
The onset of COVID-19 in the United States caused the Alumni Relations team to begin exclusively working from home in March 2020. All meetings with staff and collaborators were shifted to Zoom. Furthermore, several planned events were cancelled including Grad Party, the Rochester Alumni Social, department alumni events, and anticipated watch parties for men’s hockey. While these unplanned changes had a largely negative impact, there were some positive developments that arose out of the pandemic. Beginning immediately in March, the Alumni Relations team looked at how to salvage planned events through shifts to virtual environments. The team targeted Bulldogs Behind the Scenes, a program that provides alumni tours, as an option that could be modified to fit a virtual environment while still preserving the quality of the program. The shift to virtual tours was immediately successful, and will become a staple of programming in future years. Experimentation with virtual programs has led to other successful endeavors including collaborations with academic departments, UMD Athletics, and the Twin Cities campus.
Provide an assessment result that was important and informative for your department. What did you assess and what did you learn?

One of the 2019-20 objectives for Alumni Relations was developing Bulldogs Behind the Scenes into a recurring signature program series. We aimed to host at least three new events, and use attendance rates and survey results to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Prior to COVID, the department was able to host two in-person events: tours of WDSE and the Hermantown YMCA. The two in-person events totaled 42 guests. Survey responses were too low to be statistically significant, but anecdotal evidence made clear that attendee satisfaction was high.

Following the shift to virtual programming, Alumni Relations hosted three Virtual Bulldogs Behind the Scenes tours: Hartley Nature Center, Glensheen Mansion, and the Great Lakes Aquarium. Live attendance over the three events totaled 389 people. Additionally, recordings of the three virtual tours have been viewed 1,910 times on YouTube as of this writing. Clearly, the shift to virtual programming expanded the audience for alumni events, but it also brought in new alumni. Of the 389 guests at the virtual tours, 83 responded that this was their first-ever UMD alumni event. When asked in a survey how likely guests were to attend a future alumni event, they responded with 4.5 out of 5 (5 being most likely to attend a future alumni event). The assessment of the virtual events in spring 2020 showed Alumni Relations staff that the shift to virtual programming was more than an adequate substitute for in-person tours. Due to the increase in attendance and reach, the department now plans to increase the use of virtual tours during the pandemic, and even continue virtual tours alongside in-person events post-pandemic.

Summarize the condition of your departmental budget at the end of the year. Discuss revenues, expenses, and (if applicable) refunds in broad terms.

The programming budget for Alumni Relations realized savings in FY20 due to the cancellation of several costly events in spring 2020 (e.g. Grad Party). The event cancellations coupled with the very low of producing virtual events led to significant budget savings that was carried forward to FY21. Personnel and scholarship budgets were allocated as usual, and not impacted by COVID.