



Alumni

Maria Lopes Cardoso is Director of Partnerships, Alumni and Employability Alumni in Porto

Community: Boomerang of Hope

The University is far more than an institutional structure dedicated to teaching and research: it is a community of knowledge, shaped by shared values and culture, intellectual rigour, and a commitment to the common good. It is within this broader mission that university communities find their deepest meaning.

University communities are, by nature, plural and dynamic. They bring together Students, Faculty, Researchers, Staff, Partners, and the Alumni community, all contributing to the vitality of the academic ecosystem. These communities evolve over time, responding to social change and scientific progress, without losing sight of enduring and convergent values. What sustains them is a shared sense of belonging – the awareness that being part of a university is not confined to a single stage of life but extends across time and experience.

The Universidade Católica Portuguesa was founded upon a vision of higher education that places the human person at the centre of academic life. This vision understands the University as a crossroads where disciplines, generations, cultures, and vocations intersect. Community, in this sense, is not an accessory to academic excellence, but one of its essential conditions. Knowledge flourishes where dialogue is encouraged, where diversity and creativity are welcomed, and where each person recognizes themselves as part of a shared intellectual and human journey.

For Students, the University represents a decisive moment of formation. It is a space where academic knowledge is inseparable from personal growth, ethical reflection, and social responsibility. Student communities – academic, cultural, spiritual, and civic – play a central

role in this process. They are places of learning, collaboration, critical debate, and engagement with the world, enabling Students to develop not only professional competencies, but also a deeper awareness of their responsibilities towards others.

Within this horizon, each Student necessarily becomes an *Alumnus* or *Alumna*. Students enter the University aiming to leave it transformed in multiple dimensions: technical and scientific, human, civic, and intellectual. The status of Alumni is not merely a future designation, but an aspirational horizon that gives meaning to the present experience of university life. From the very first day, Students are invited to consider themselves as part of a living culture and tradition that they will one day carry forward. This perspective reinforces a sense of responsibility, continuity, and commitment, reminding us that the education received is not intended solely for the individual but for the communities they will serve beyond the University.

Alumni are one of the most enduring expressions of the university ecosystem. Far from marking an endpoint, graduation transforms the relationship between the individual and the institution, giving Alumni the awareness that they carry not only academic qualifications, but a formative experience that continues to shape their professional paths, civic engagement, and personal choices. From that moment on, they extend the presence of the University within society, translating its values into concrete action. Frequently, they return to their *Alma Mater* – to seek higher or executive education, to participate in research or mentoring, or to contribute to the University's ongoing development. Alumni are therefore crucial in helping the University improve its present and expand its impact.

The Alumni Community thus expresses an essential movement: what the University offers goes out into the world and returns enriched. Knowledge, values, critical thinking, and openness to others are seeds that, as they bear fruit in the professional and civic lives of Alumni, return to the University in the form of testimony, commitment, service, trust, and hope.

Like a boomerang, the university experience returns with new questions, new knowledge, and renewed hopes, grounded in the same matrix of values believed to have been transmitted during that extraordinary stage of life when consciences are formed and diverse, foundational skill portfolios are developed. It is an age later recalled

with nostalgia – a time when mistakes were part of learning within a safe environment; when classes, readings, and discoveries were spaces for receiving, internalizing, maturing, and questioning, but also moments in which none of us had to be the main protagonist. It is a time of preparation and formation for lives of greater responsibility and leadership.

In post-university life, each *Alumnus* or *Alumna* thus becomes a mediator between the University and society. Upon returning – symbolically or concretely – they bring with them the density of lived experience, the challenges faced, and the maturity acquired. This movement of departure and return is not automatic; it is the result of a carefully nurtured relationship, a cultivated sense of belonging, and a shared awareness of mission. Each time an *Alumnus* returns to the classroom – through the lifelong learning that contemporary life demands – they bring a perspective unique to them: rooted in early adulthood, enriched by professional life, and driven by the pursuit of knowledge and the exchange of ideas that intellectual curiosity and the challenges of new eras impose.

At the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, we are very proud of our Students and Alumni: Cardinals, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Prime Ministers, Ministers and Government members, politicians, entrepreneurs, and professionals from Arts, Biotechnology, Business and Economics, Education and Psychology, Health Sciences and Nursing, Human Sciences, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Theology, and all those whose lives have been shaped by our education across different continents and countries.

For us, our Alumni community is essential to the fulfilment of our mission and *raison d'être*. The diversity of Alumni trajectories – professional, geographical, and generational – enriches the collective identity of the University, creating spaces of mentorship, intellectual exchange, and solidarity. They offer Students living examples of how academic formation can serve society. For Alumni themselves, the awareness of belonging to this community allows them to maintain a living connection to the intellectual and human environment that shaped them, as well as to the repository of memories that preserves meaningful and nostalgic relationships.

The unbreakable bond between the University and its Alumni is founded on reciprocity and shared responsibility, strengthened through dialogue, recognition, and the creation of opportunities for meaningful

participation in academic life. Alumni engagement is most authentic when it rests not merely on institutional loyalty, but on a sustained commitment to the University's educational, cultural, and social mission. In this sense, Alumni do not remain on the margins of the University: they are an integral part of its present and its future.

In a globalized world undergoing rapid transformation, university communities face new challenges and opportunities. Digital technologies have expanded the reach of academic and Alumni networks, enabling connections that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Yet these opportunities must be balanced by face-to-face encounters that nurture the essence of community built upon trust, shared purpose, and genuine engagement. Universities are called to create spaces and moments where such encounters may continue to occur and where different generations recognize themselves as part of the same story.

The university community is called to be relational and open, dynamic, challenging, and a creator of trust and reference points – a space where learning is inseparable from care, where belonging is renewed through participation, and where each generation – Students who become Alumni, Alumni who inspire new generations and contribute to the University's development – is invited to receive, transform, and transmit a living and hopeful tradition.

Following Pope Francis (16 December 2020, at the launch of Mission 4.7 and the Global Compact on Education):

"Education is an act of hope. It is a movement toward the future, carried out together, in community, so that knowledge may serve the dignity of every person and the common good."

It is within this continuous movement of departure, return, and giving back – of formation, testimony, culture, and service – that the Alumni Community reveals itself as a true boomerang of hope.