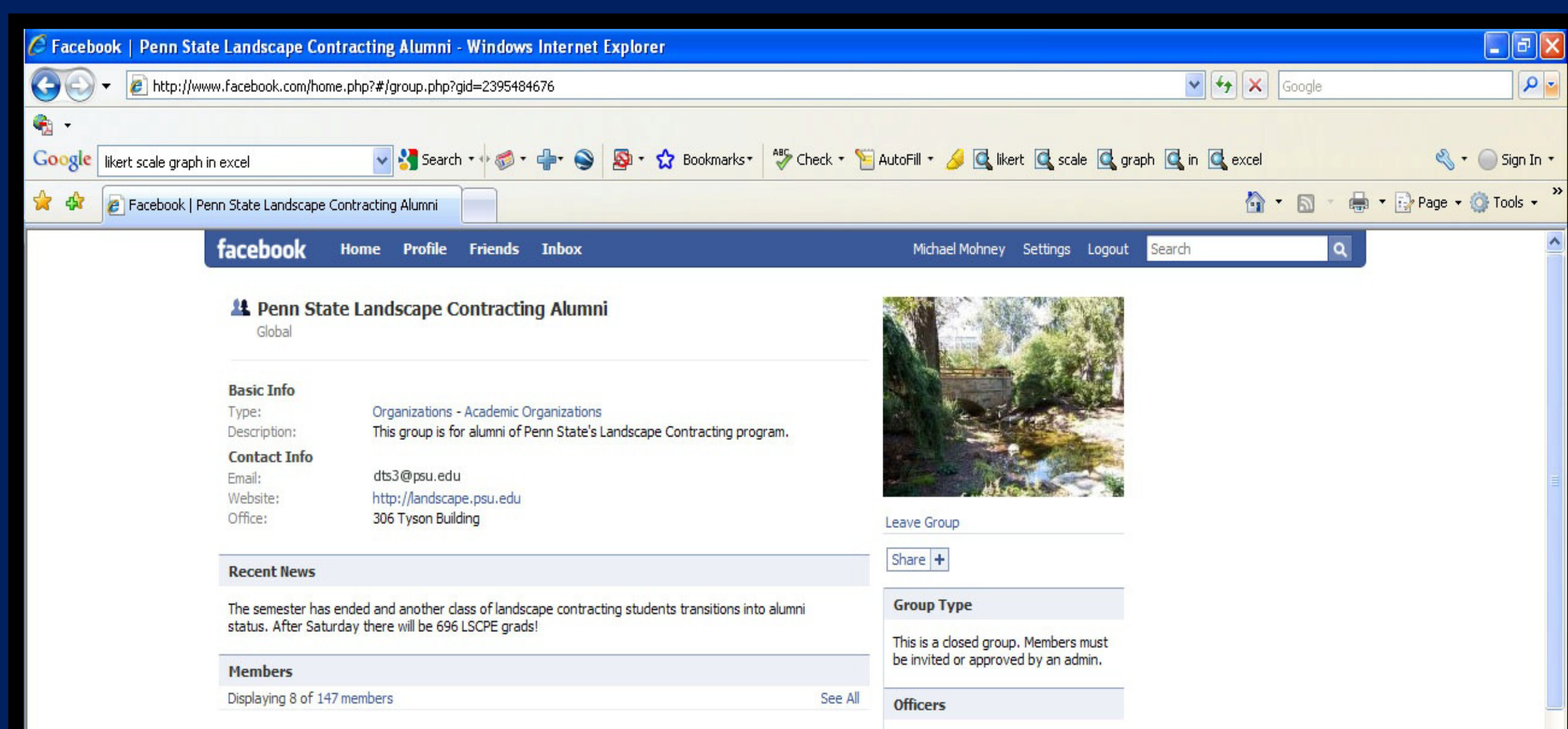# Using a Social Network as a Tool for Communicating with Alumni

Michael R. Mohney, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Michael E. Reinert, Iowa State University, Ames, IA
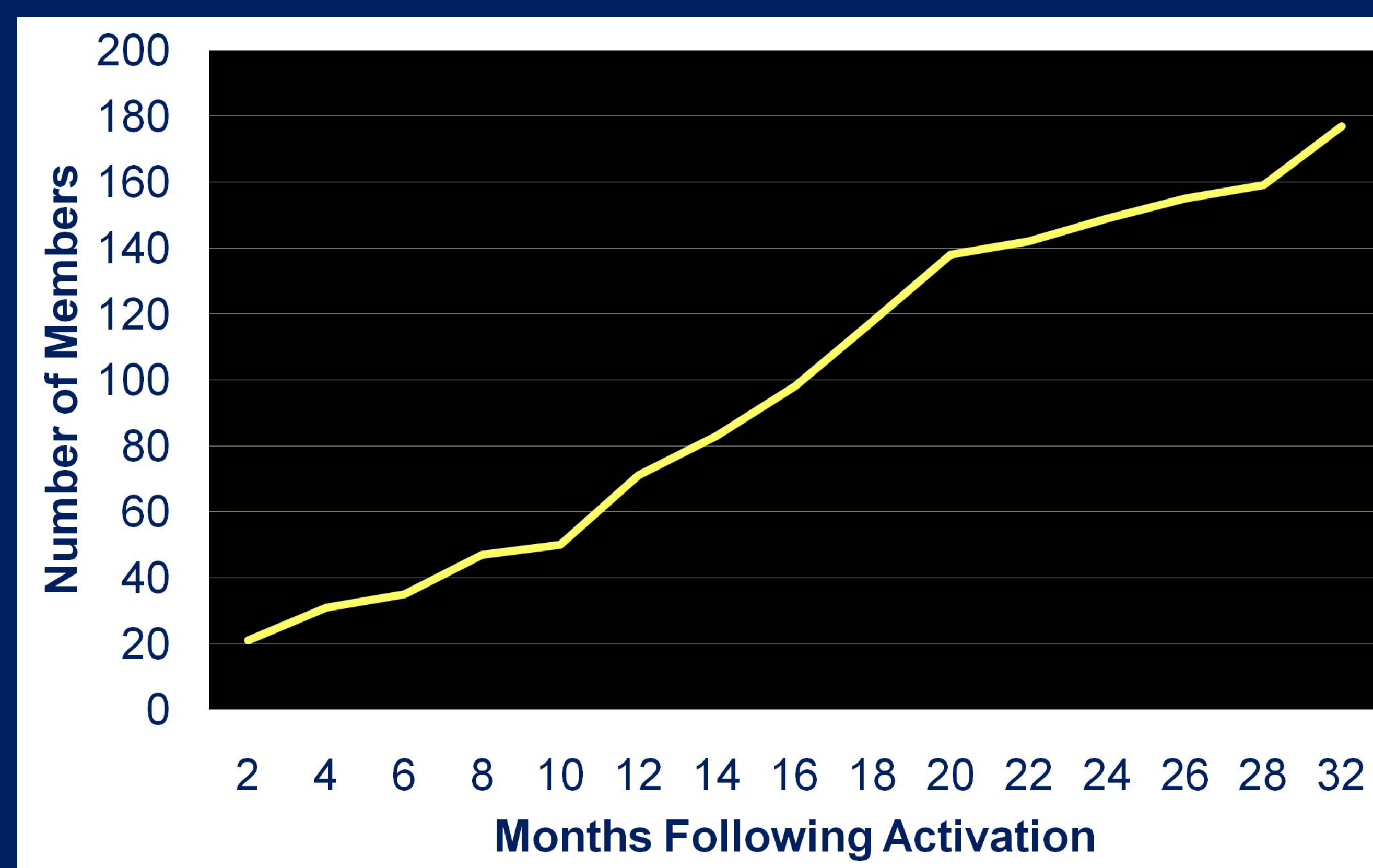Dan T. Stearns, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn have become common communication tools for many students and an increasing number of faculty.
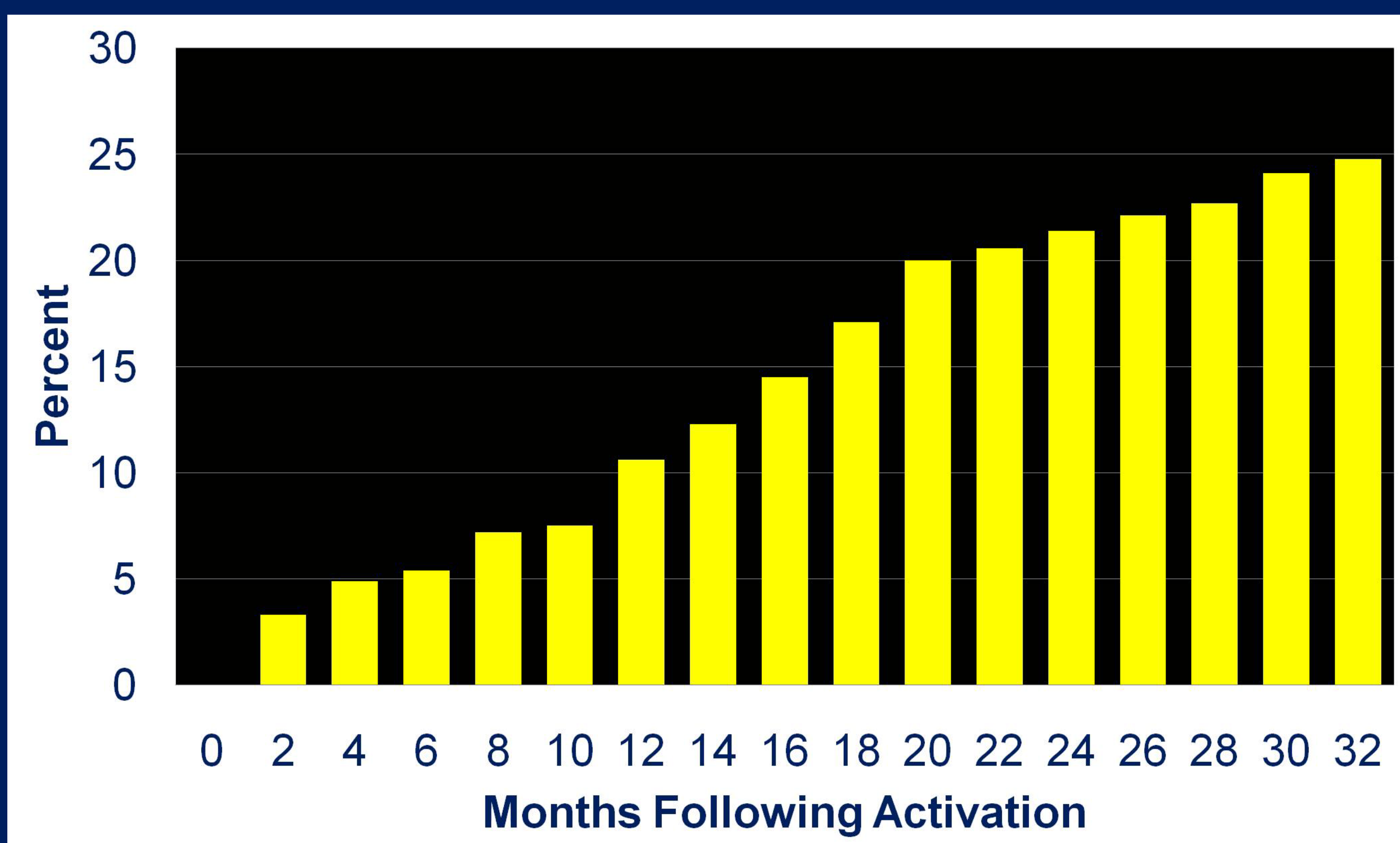

In July 2007, faculty in Penn State's department of horticulture established an alumni user group on Facebook in an attempt to enhance communications with graduates of the Landscape Contracting program. The group was titled "Penn State Landscape Contracting Alumni".

The alumni group was activated with no marketing or general announcement to graduates. Twenty-one graduates found the site and joined in the first two months. By February 2009 membership had grown to 138, and by February 2010 it had grown to 177.

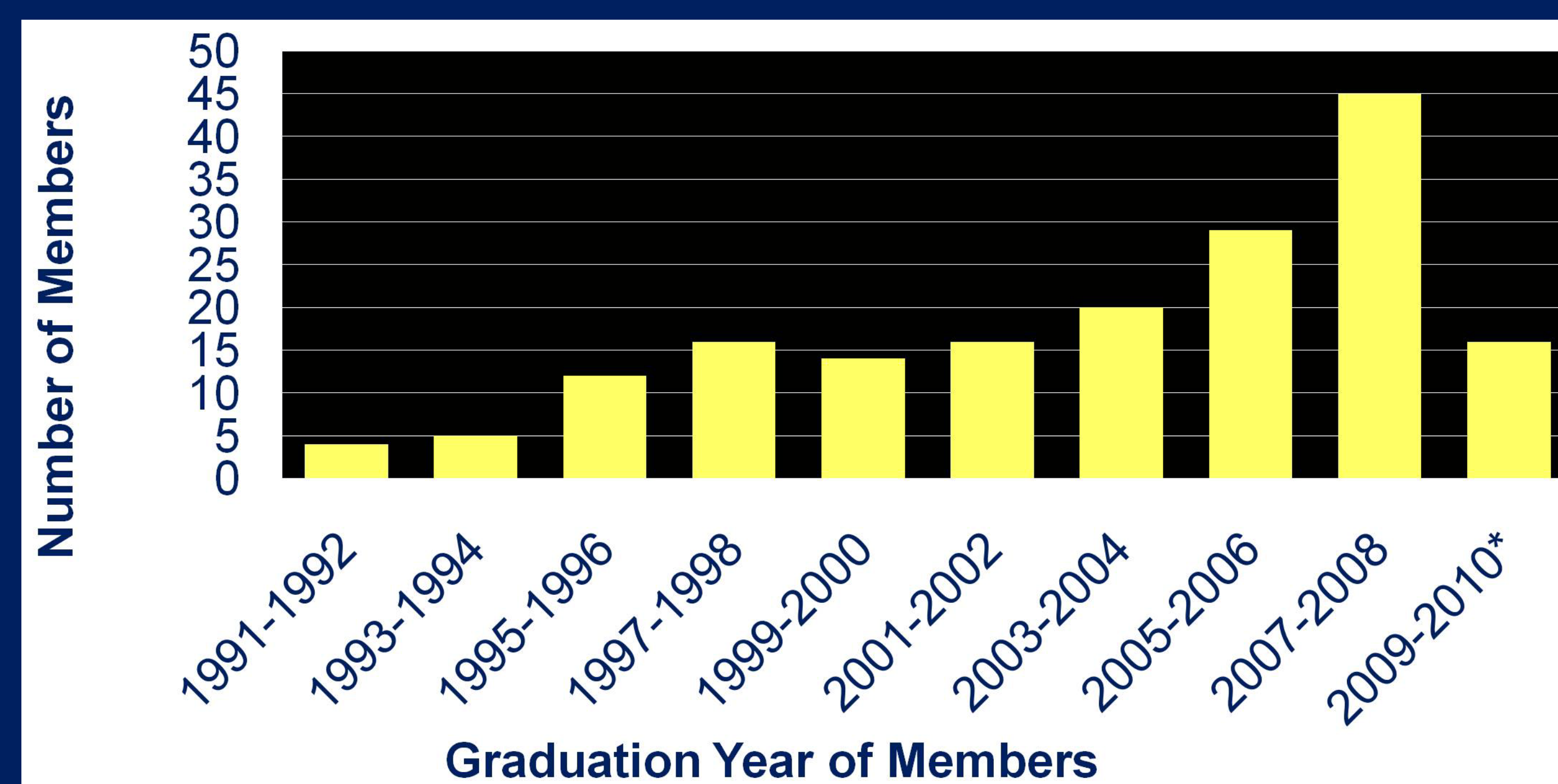**Group Membership at Two-Month Intervals**

Members as a Percentage of Total Graduates

Percent of the total number of landscape contracting graduates increased steadily, as the number of alumni joining the group exceeded the number of new graduates.

In 2009, 40.8% of Facebook users were between the ages of 18 and 24. By 2010, Facebook increased its user base to over 103 million, with the 35+ demographic now representing more than 30% of the entire user base. If this trend continues, we expect to see an increase in group enrollment among older alumni.

http://www.istrategylabs.com/2010/01/facebook-demographics-and-statistics-report-2010-145-growth-in-1-year/

Group Membership by Graduation Year

* Thru February 2010

The Facebook group *Penn State Landscape Contracting Alumni* has become an important vehicle for communications between faculty and alumni. Faculty post news about events, field trips, and accomplishments, as well as information about employment opportunities. Alumni use the site to connect with faculty, classmates and friends.