



STRATEGIES FOR LEVERAGING ALUMNI STATUS TO ADVOCATE FOR RACIAL EQUITY

Introduction

Alumni possess a unique position within their alma maters, often viewed as trusted stakeholders with deep ties to their institutions. Leveraging this status can be a powerful tool in advocating for racial equity in higher education. As we witness increasing backlash to equity efforts necessary to remedy systemic inequities, alumni have a unique role to play in ensuring that institutional administrators stand firm in their commitment to making their campuses hospitable places for all students. Alumni can harness their influence, connections, and resources to effect meaningful change. Here are several strategies that alumni can utilize to promote racial equity effectively.

1. Form or Join Alumni Networks Focused on Racial Equity

Creating or participating in alumni networks dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) can amplify voices advocating for racial equity. These networks can serve as platforms for sharing experiences, organizing events, and mobilizing alumni for advocacy efforts.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Establish an alumni group focused on racial equity issues and create a mission statement that outlines objectives.
- Host regular meetings to discuss challenges and strategize solutions.
- Partner with student organizations to ensure a continuous dialogue between current students and alumni.

2. Engage in Ongoing Dialogue with University Leadership

Alumni can initiate or continue ongoing conversations with university administrators to express concerns about racial equity on campus. Establishing formal channels for regular communication ensures that discussions remain focused, constructive, and solution-oriented. This includes addressing specific issues such as the underrepresentation of students of color, disparities in funding for programs that support these students, and the lack of diversity among faculty and staff.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Request regular meetings with university leaders to discuss racial equity initiatives, presenting a well-researched agenda.
- Co-create a list of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the institution to utilize to track diversity and equity efforts.
- Create a coalition of alumni to amplify concerns and share diverse perspectives, and establish a formal structure for ongoing engagement with university leadership.

3. Strategic Planning and Clear Advocacy Priorities

Establishing a strategic plan with clear advocacy priorities can guide alumni efforts and ensure that their actions are focused and impactful. This involves identifying specific goals, target audiences, and key messages that resonate with stakeholders within the university and the wider community.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Conduct a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to identify areas of focus for advocacy efforts.
- Collaboratively set measurable goals and develop timelines to assess progress on advocacy initiatives.
- Engage a diverse group of alumni in the planning process to ensure that a range of perspectives and experiences inform the strategic plan.

4. Utilize Social Media and Other Media Outlets

Alumni can harness the power of social media and other media outlets to raise awareness and engage their peers in conversations about racial equity. Sharing personal stories, research, institutional statistics, and utilizing various platforms can help highlight the need for change.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Create social media campaigns that focus on racial equity issues within the university, using specific hashtags to unify messaging.
- Develop a series of infographics and video testimonials to share across platforms.
- Leverage traditional media outlets such as newspapers, local publications, and television to reach broader audiences and generate discussions on racial equity topics.
- Collaborate with other alumni from different institutions to widen the reach of advocacy efforts.

5. Advocate for Inclusive Alumni Events

Advocating for the inclusion of diverse voices at alumni events can help ensure that discussions about equity are prioritized. Encouraging the university to invite speakers who focus on racial equity or include panels discussing these issues can foster a more inclusive environment.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Propose equity-focused topics and speakers for alumni events, ensuring that voices from historically marginalized communities are included.
- Organize alumni gatherings that specifically address racial equity in higher education, potentially in partnership with DEI offices or other on-campus offices that support affinity groups or multicultural students.

- Share outcomes and discussions from these events with university leadership to maintain focus on equity issues.

6. Support and Preserve Scholarships for Underrepresented Students

Alumni can contribute financially or through fundraising efforts to scholarships and programs aimed at supporting underrepresented students. This direct investment demonstrates a commitment to fostering an inclusive campus. It is essential to prioritize the preservation of existing scholarship funds, particularly in the wake of attacks on DEI initiatives, to ensure that these vital resources continue to support marginalized communities.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Establish scholarship funds that are designed to support students who are underrepresented on the relevant campuses, including students of color or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- It is still very possible to develop scholarship programs that can advance educational equity while still complying with civil rights laws, and ensuring their defensibility will help support the preservation of these funds against potential cuts or reallocation due to changes in policies or laws.
- Consult with legal organizations to explore strategies for protecting existing and new scholarship funds from being impacted by current and future challenges to DEI initiatives.
- Collaborate with the university's development office to protect funding to support the advancement of groups underrepresented on campus, ensuring a transparent, lawful process for selecting beneficiaries.
- Engage alumni in fundraising campaigns that emphasize the importance of educational equity, the positive impact of these scholarships, and the need to preserve them as essential resources for underrepresented students.

7. Monitor Institutional Progress on Equity Goals

Alumni should hold their institutions accountable by monitoring progress on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Regularly reviewing university demographic data and outcomes related to student admissions, retention, and graduation rates can provide insight into areas needing improvement.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Request access to institutional reports, detailing:
 - campus student demographic representation as compared to the representation of students from their recruitment area (e.g., local, regional, or national) to identify potential areas of underrepresentation and areas that require more intentional diversity recruitment strategies;
 - enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, by race and ethnicity; and
 - funding allocations towards programs and initiatives that build learning environments that advance diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging
- Develop or disseminate and broadly amplify annual reports or newsletters to share findings and progress of institution's good faith efforts to address problem areas with fellow alumni and university stakeholders, fostering ongoing awareness and advocacy.
- Organize town hall meetings or webinars to discuss findings with alumni and the university community, providing a platform for collective action and to identify ways that alumni can help support institutions implement their good faith efforts to advance equity.

8. "Standing in the Gap" Programming

Alumni can play a vital role in "standing in the gap" to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campus. By evaluating the needs of the campus community and supplementing university efforts, alumni can help strengthen the support for underrepresented students.

EXAMPLES:

- Strengthen pipelines to underserved communities by partnering with the enrollment management office to develop an alumni recruitment program.
- Develop a mentorship program that connects current students with alumni for guidance and support.
- Address food insecurity by donating to campus food banks or meal plans.
- Create emergency fund programs to assist students facing financial challenges.

9. Engage with Local and National Communities and Advocacy Groups

Alumni can extend their advocacy efforts beyond the university to local, state, and national communities and organizations dedicated to racial equity. Collaborating with

grassroots and larger advocacy organizations can amplify their impact and build alliances for broader systemic change.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Partner with community organizations and national groups that focus on educational equity, sharing resources and best practices.
- Participate in or organize community and state events that educate others about the importance of racial equity in higher education.
- Leverage alumni networks to mobilize support for local, state, and national initiatives, creating a stronger community presence for equity advocacy.

10. Develop and Leverage Relationships with State and Local Officials

Alumni can strengthen their advocacy efforts by developing and maintaining relationships with local and state officials. Engaging policymakers can help raise awareness of racial equity issues and create pathways for institutional support and resources.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Schedule meetings with state and local officials to discuss the importance of racial equity in education and share specific concerns from the alumni community.
- Collaborate on initiatives that promote equity, such as legislative proposals or community programs.
- Encourage alumni to participate in local government meetings and forums, advocating for policies that support racial equity in higher education.
- Monitor anti-DEIA legislation and policies and their possible impact on campus diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and funding on campus. ([Here](#) is a helpful tracker.)

11. Preserve Institutional Knowledge of Advocacy Efforts

Ensuring the preservation of institutional knowledge related to advocacy efforts is crucial for maintaining momentum and building on past successes. Alumni can play a key role in documenting and passing on insights, strategies, and relationships developed during their tenure.

ACTIONABLE STEPS:

- Create a centralized repository of advocacy materials, including reports, meeting notes, and successful campaign strategies, accessible to incoming alumni and student leaders.

- Establish mentorship programs where outgoing alumni can guide and share knowledge with new leaders in alumni networks and student organizations.
- Encourage documentation of advocacy efforts in annual reports or newsletters, ensuring that valuable experiences and lessons learned are retained for future generations.

Conclusion

By utilizing their status as alumni, individuals can play a critical role in advocating for racial equity at their universities. These strategies not only promote change within the institution but also foster a sense of community and solidarity among alumni committed to social justice. As trusted voices, alumni have the potential to influence policy, reshape campus culture, and create equitable educational opportunities for all students.

References

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