

Date: August 25, 2019  
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Cc: Black Student Advisory Council – University of Kentucky

## **Steps Forward – Advancing Diversity at the University of Kentucky**

In early August, I had the unique opportunity to meet with Dr. Karl Reid, the Executive Director of the National Society of Black Engineers. He provided extensive insight into the state of diversity on our campus, as well as how the BSAC might best move forward in its relationship with the University's administration.

What follows is an abridged summary of our conversation, as it pertains to the standing of African Americans at our University.

*Any notes or suggestions that I have made independent of Dr. Reid are italicized.*

### **Successful Advocacy**

#### Know Your Audience

Universities have a set of priorities that must be met before anything else. Generally, this can be broken down into four categories:

1. Alumni
2. Retention Rates
3. Student Satisfaction
4. Faculty Tenure

When approaching the University for funding or support of campus initiatives, build your presentation and suggestions around any of these four pillars. Universities generally don't support good things just because they are good; they do so because they are strategic.

*In my opinion, the most strategic option in our case would be to focus not merely on the satisfaction of URM students on our campus, but also to seek the support of black alumni groups in increasing retention and graduation rates of black students at our university. Cases for improving housing, enrollment, financial aid, and the like should be built around these arguments.*

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## Financial Aid & Scholarships

### On increasing scholarship opportunities for African Americans:

Activate the Alumni Association. Outside of faculty, alumni generally have the greatest influence over university administrators, and making inroads with black alumni groups can secure gifts for the University (on the condition that the University provide greater funding to African American students and enrollees). When we sell the Alumni Association, then the administration's on-board. Search for their motivations in funding.

### On the redistribution of financial aid from African Americans to other URM groups:

When seeking additional financial aid for black students, make sure that you do not discredit other URM groups' needs for financial aid. Do not request that funding for African Americans is increased at the expense of other minority groups on campus. "You should seek to expand the pie, rather than your slice of the pie," largely in the form of scholarships and financial aid.

### Correlations Between Financial Aid, Retention and Graduation Rates for Black Students:

Dr. Reid suggested that our students study the correlation between retention rates for and scholarships for African American students at the University of Kentucky. A college-wide study - through the Office of Institutional Diversity - could be used to make the case to the administration on the value of increasing financial aid to black students.

A previous study on this subject conducted by the UNCF found that a measurable correlation between the amount of aid provided to a black student and the likelihood that the student would graduate. [The study, recommended by Dr. Reid, can be found here.](#)

*Students have access to the Interactive Fact Book from the University's Analytics department (IRRA), which can be used to analyze additional data on the subject. Some data will require students to request access from UK's Analytics department. While the University is reviewing the William C. Parker Scholarship, I encourage the Advisory Council to study the correlation between ethnicity and unmet need, as the University itself has concluded that [unmet need is the strongest indicator of retaining students.](#) [The Fact-Book can be found here.](#)*

*Additionally, it may be helpful to note that tuition costs at UK have risen significantly since the Recession, largely due to a series of cuts in aid from the State Legislature - from \$315 million in FY2010 to \$261 million in FY2020. [Additional data can be found in the University's Budget Presentation, available here. \(See Pg. 9\)](#)*

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### On the feasibility of work-study programs:

When necessary, students can take part in work-study programs – so long as those programs do not take the students away from campus, which would otherwise negatively impact their studies.

## **Institutional Diversity**

*As context, I asked Dr. Reid if diversity should be constrained to metrics of ethnic representation or if it should be broadened to include students from at-risk communities, regardless of their ethnic background (i.e.: white students from Appalachia, LGBTQ+ students, etc.).*

The broader the definition of institutional diversity is, the better the institution. Both ethnicity and financial need should be considered by an institution, and that – in a knowledge economy – the most important part of institution is its diversity of experiences and thought. (See *The Diversity Bonus* by Dr. Scott Page.)

That being said, it is equally important that the University use data to determine where the greatest needs are – and allocate resources accordingly. Ultimately, the goal of the institution should equity rather than equality.

*Upon reviewing the statistics of our University, he cited the Native American student-community as the most relevant example of this intersection, as the minority group's enrollment, retention and graduation rates are extremely low and vary wildly year-by-year.*

## **Social Justice**

*The suggestions below significantly parallel the results of last semester's protests.*

Before I attended M.I.T., the students of our school put together a list of suggestions – not demands – to combat the lack of diversity on our campus, and – with the help of the University Provost – brought it before the administration. Ultimately, those policies were put into place, in large part due to the advocacy and leadership of the Provost.

That said, it is important to identify a leader for your cause within the administration. Without faculty leadership, your mission is much harder, and you may find yourself just spinning wheels rather than making progress.

Protest should not be the first step, but a last resort. You should strive to save face for the administration, and, whenever possible, take the high road. Your goal should ultimately be to operationalize concrete solutions to the state of diversity on your campus, and that requires that either you or an advocate are in the room.

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## **Executive Summary**

After the successes of the protests last semester, this upcoming year will be critical to building meaningful solutions for students of color at our University.

An administration-level advocate for black students should be identified as soon as possible, and, as far as possible, interactions with the administration should be done in good faith.

As the Advisory Council is included in scholarship reviews and student search committees, several steps should be taken:

1. Because alumni have significant influence on the administration, the BSAC should engage black alumni groups to provide financial stimulus to the University in return for increased black enrollment and retainment.
2. The University should conduct a study on the correlation between retention rates for black students and the scholarships provided to them, in order to substantiate the argument for increasing financial aid to black students.
3. The University should conduct a study on the correlations between ethnicity and unmet need, as the University has previously identified unmet need as the greatest indicator of retention.

While reviewing the Parker and Johnson scholarships, the Advisory Council should not increase the number of scholarships for black students at the expense of other minority groups. Instead, the overall number of diversity scholarships provided should be increased, providing a greater number of scholarships to all underrepresented minorities at the University of Kentucky.