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## Original Article

# Cultivating future fundraisers of color at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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**ABSTRACT** Although population predictions suggest that over the next 40 years, minorities will become the new majority in the country, the fundraising profession is not listening to these predictions as its demographics remain unchanged. The fact that President Obama has called for more Americans to become college educated, which says more and more people of color will be tomorrow's alumni base, seemingly would indicate an increased need for fundraisers of color. This article focuses on a possible solution to this dilemma by suggesting historically black colleges cultivate their own future fundraisers to satisfy the nation's growing need for fundraisers of color.

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Our nation's population is diversifying as evidenced by the projected shift in the United States' demographics. By

2050, minorities will become the majority in the country, which should suggest to colleges and universities as well as other nonprofit organizations the need to recruit fundraisers of color who can relate to diverse student population (US Census 2000).

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Unfortunately, the fundraising profession and its demographic makeup are not reflective of this trend, as only approximately 11 percent of the nearly 30 000 registered fundraisers are minorities (Association of Fundraising Professions, [www.afpnet.org](http://www.afpnet.org)). Although professional organizations such as the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Association of Fundraising Professionals promote diversity initiatives nationally and locally, these efforts alone are not enough to increase the level of participation of minorities in the field.

Currently, there is a demand for fundraisers of color. Minority serving colleges and universities are in need of fundraisers as are historically White institutions that are trying to reach out to their alumni of color and have little insight into the best approaches. In addition, there are many non-profit organizations that work with colleges and universities and other causes that are interested in diversifying their fundraising staffs. However, there are just not enough applicants to fill the vacancies.

This situation presents a huge opportunity for Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to get involved, assume a leadership role in the undertaking of this dilemma, and begin to reduce the fundraiser deficit that currently exists and continues to widen. Rather than relying on the established professional associations to amplify their diversity efforts and raise awareness about the fundraising occupation to young people, HBCUs could begin offering humanities and business-based programs in philanthropy and fundraising at the undergraduate level

and, in effect, develop their own crop of future development officers. Not only would HBCUs benefit from programs such as these, but non-profits of all shapes and sizes would have a larger variety of potential fundraisers at their disposal from whom to choose.

### **WHY THE DEARTH OF FUNDRAISERS?**

Therefore why are there so few people of color in the field of fundraising? First, most students of color do not see fundraising as a viable option due to their limited exposure to the field – one that is dominated by older White men. During a recent discussion about careers in fundraising with students in an American Humanics (AH) program, students revealed their understanding of non-profits and strong passion to become involved, but many questioned whether fundraising was a serious career choice. AH is a college level program geared at those interested in securing future leadership positions in the non-profit job sector. Young people often look for role models in their family and community to emulate. However, as most minority fundraisers are first generation and the majority of them have ascended into the profession as a second career, students know little about fundraising as a career. Second, many students see working at a non-profit organization as charity. They hear the term non-profit and assume ‘no profit’ and a small salary – if any – not realizing that fundraisers make substantial incomes and have ample opportunities to move up quickly in the profession (personal communication, October 2009). Third, some students assume that fundraising is only about money

and, out of fear of asking for donations, avoid the profession all together.

In reality, there are many aspects of the fundraising profession, including prospect research, alumni relations and stewardship that do not involve a solicitation. Moreover, most of a development professional's time is spent recruiting, training, and motivating volunteers, segmenting donor databases, writing grant proposals and managing phone campaigns. The best development professionals naturally inspire trust and are often referred to as friend raisers (Best Careers 2009; *US News and World Report*, December 2008). Fundraisers are also highly skilled at matching donor interests to institutional needs such that when the time comes to ask for a gift, the donor has already indicated his or her commitment and it is just a matter of the amount that needs to be determined.

One other misconception offered up by the American Humanics students, which speaks to a more widely held misconception about the profession, involves ethics. The students wondered how ethical is it for nonprofits to hire fundraisers (salespeople) to solicit funds and whether their parents would consider fundraising for a nonprofit organization to be charity work.

If the students studying non-profit management have these misconceptions about non-profit organizations, one can only wonder how uninformed the general public is on the topic. These revelations suggest that the profession, professional organizations and institutions of higher learning must commit to creating a clearer message about the fundraising profession. Otherwise, how do we

cultivate future fundraisers, especially those of color?

## **SOME CURRENT EXAMPLES**

There are several model programs for producing fundraisers. However, none of these programs have a focus on producing fundraisers of color or on philanthropy within diverse contexts. I will highlight two of these programs below:

### **Indiana university-Purdue university Indianapolis's bachelor of arts program**

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis offers a PhD, Masters of Arts and Bachelors of Arts degree in philanthropic studies through its School of Liberal Arts. The School also houses the Center on Philanthropy that is recognized internationally as the leading academic center dedicated to increasing the understanding of philanthropy and improving its practice. For more than 20 years, the Center has professionalized fundraising through its academic programs, research and public service. The Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in philanthropic studies provides a theoretical framework and practical knowledge for students who want to turn their passions for civic engagement into professions.

### **New York university's Master's degree in fundraising and grantmaking**

The Heyman Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising located at New York University offers a MS in fundraising and grant making. Students are allowed to select between the two disciplines based on their academic and professional interest and then choose an area of concentration through elective courses focusing on



the arts, health sciences, higher education or politics. Internships in the field provide a hands-on experience for students to apply the knowledge obtained in the classroom. The program culminates with a capstone project, which involves original research and the writing of a Master's thesis based on the student's findings.

Although both of the programs are highly respected, the fact that both are housed at majority institutions creates a few barriers for potential fundraisers of color. For instance, these schools are not the schools of choice for many student of color as evidenced by their low minority student enrollment numbers. And, historically, these institutions primarily catered and marketed themselves to a predominantly White audience.

### **WHAT ABOUT A FUNDRAISING PROGRAM AT AN HBCU?**

In order to establish a fundraising program, at an HBCU, there must first be an interest generated in the area of philanthropy as a profession. Career services offices could begin the educational process by initiating conversations with their school's advancement officers regarding various career opportunities within the field. The next step could be to host a series of workshops for student organizations such as the Student Government Association, sororities and fraternities. Advancement officers from various non-profits could be invited to speak at these gatherings on fundraising careers options. From there, these and other charitable organizations could be invited to participate in career fairs alongside their for profit counterparts.

The benefits of an HBCU fundraising program include being able to train future development officers who are familiar with the HBCU environment and the need to be innovative due to the lack of resources. These professionals would be greatly sought after as their skill sets would prove extremely beneficial to HBCUs. Black institutions are disproportionately disadvantaged in the area of institutional advancement; typically suffering from a lack of key personnel, professional training and numerous technical resources (Gasman and Anderson, 2003).

Another advantage resulting from an HBCU fundraising program is producing fundraisers who can better relate to the alumni. Whereas the formalized fundraising practiced by HBCUs and more specifically the 47 public HBCUs is still relatively new – less than 20 years – many black alumni were never solicited during their time on campus nor have they been contacted since graduation. The idea of having someone approach them who looks like them and is very familiar with the HBCU experience, significantly increases the chances of, at the very least, reestablishing a relationship, and at the very best, securing a major or planned gift.

One additional advantage of an HBCU fundraiser program is the bond of loyalty that would be created between the current students and their HBCUs. Moreover, a culture of philanthropy that could be stimulated and nurtured throughout the campus could begin to exist as a result of a fundraising program. Often times on HBCU campuses, there is grumbling amongst members of the student body when there are not enough resources



for programs. Students in a fundraising program could encourage other students to generate funding for their own programs – in effect, teaching fundraising. Over time as students graduate and move on with their lives, this introduction to philanthropy may continue to manifest in the form of increased alumni giving levels at all HBCUs, which currently hovers between five and nine percent on average.

The African American community as a whole would also benefit as an HBCU fundraising program presents another mid to upper level professional career opportunity to which young people can aspire. Although historically Blacks have always been communal in their giving (Gasman and Sedgwick, 2005), very seldom are African Americans seen as the relationship cultivator or the major gifts officer. Seeing a likeness of one's self in a position of power and prestige that had previously only been occupied by another race makes it believable, attainable and desirable.

Currently there is a great demand for African American fundraisers by majority institutions. The fact that there are very few institutions that are 100 percent White anymore means that there are very few all White alumni constituencies. If the population prediction shifts are true,

alumni of color may soon dominate the database much like Whites do now. White institutions, as of late, are finally beginning to recognize the sea change of color on their campuses and are now looking inward at their alumni to determine what other colors may be there. As a result, they are beginning to lure Black development officers to their institutions to capitalize on this constituency that for decades remained unnoticed.

These trend changes and anticipated demographic shifts are certainly ample reasons for HBCUs to consider creating fundraising and philanthropy curriculums at many of their institutions. The idea of being on the front-end of identifying and seizing the opportunity to become the leading source of African American development officers would certainly be a great moniker to have whereas adding to the legacy of HBCU.

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