

Executive Summary

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded because blacks did not have an opportunity to receive an education at pre-dominantly white institutions. In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Act was established to help schools educate farmers, scientists and teachers.

Alcorn State University was one of the first schools designated as a black-land grant college. During this historical period, The Freedman's Bureau, American Missionary Association (AMA) and black churches created schools for blacks to attend.

The Freedman's Bureau was established by Congress in 1865 to help blacks and poor whites after the U.S. Civil War. One of their goals was to help blacks transition from slavery into a free-labor society. The Freedman's Bureau founded Hampton, Howard and Fisk universities.

The AMA also took on the responsibility of preparing blacks for a teaching education. LeMoyne College was one of the schools. It was a normal school created to educate blacks on how to teach other blacks. The AMA staunchly advocated that "no race should be permanently dependent upon another for their own development."

Today, LeMoyne-Owen College is 153 years-old and is still responsible for educating African-American students in Memphis, Tennessee and around the nation. Since the inception of the College, it has produced many notable alumni who have excelled in education, business, healthcare and local government.

It has been described as a beacon of hope for first year generation college students. And over the years, it has evolved into a college with a residence hall to attract students from other cities and countries.

The National Alumni Association, Memphis Chapter and Alumni Relations Office wanted to explore ways to improve the College and Alumni Relations. As a result, a research project was conducted to get statistical data from alums about their thoughts and feelings. The research methods were an electronic survey and a focus group.

The survey was used to gather primary research from LeMoyne-Owen College Alumni. According to the Office of Institutional Advancement staff, emails were sent to approximately 2400 alums asking for participation. The survey was open from Nov. 2 to Nov. 7. A total of 31 participants responded to the survey before the deadline.

1. When did you graduate from LeMoyne-Owen College?

- prior to 1968
- 1969 - 1989
- 1990 - 1999
- 2000 and since

2. When was the last time you attended an alumni association event (e.g meeting, activity)?

- Within the last 3 - 6 months
- Within the last year
- Over a year ago
- Not since graduation

3. When was the last time you connected with LeMoyne-Owen College (e.g sporting event, campus visit, community service project)?

- Within the last 3 - 6 months
- Within the last year
- Over a year ago
- Not since graduation

4. Are you receiving printed communication from the College (e.g. *Beacon* magazine, direct mail postcards)?

- yes
- no

5. Which of the following is the best method for communicating with you?

- E-mail
- Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter or Instagram)
- Regular Mail
- Phone
- Other (please specify)

6. What is your basic perception of the College?

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Neutral

7. Are you working in your major field of study?

- Yes
- No

8. What is your highest level of educational achievement?

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Certification (s)

9. The Memphis Chapter of the Association meets monthly, on the 1st Sunday at 4:00 p.m. in the Dorothy Harris Lounge. Would another day and time be more convenient for you?

- Saturday afternoon (1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.)
- Thursday evening (6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.)
- Sunday (4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.)
- Other

10. Are you familiar with the following giving options at the College (e.g. Annual Fund, LOC Sunday, Designated Gifts and Planned Giving)?

- Familiar with all options
- Familiar with 1 - 2 options
- Not familiar with any options

The survey results were used to develop more probing questions about the College and Alumni Relations. The results are an attachment to this report.

The primary research question is how do we engage, connect and get more alumni to invest in the College. Connecting with alumni is critical to the success of the College. And, the vehicle for connecting is communication that reaches all alumni (e.g. Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials).

Alumni have benefited from the College with an education, but they also want to know that their investment back into the College is making a difference. As a nonprofit educational system, giving back is how the College will sustain its operations in years to come. In addition to giving, there also has to be accountability on behalf of the College and staff. Alumni are considered as donors too and want to know that their money is being used wisely and for the betterment of the institution.

The focus group consisted of the following alumni:

Dorothy Harris, '68
Dorothy Johnson, '74
Sandra Walls '72
Earl Edwards, '77
Rosalind Davis, '92
Maude Washington, '04

Overall, the focus group participants all want to see changes and improvements within the College. They all agree that the College prepared them for their professional careers.

The focus group moderator was Paula Anderson '96. Katrina Thompson '77 and Sadie Wiley '62 served as observers.

The initial question posed to group was "What are your thoughts about historically black colleges and universities" and do you think they are relevant in 2015?

All of the participants agreed that HBCUs still serve a purpose and what they provide cannot be acquired at a larger institution. The common theme among the participants was "nurturing." Dorothy Harris, '68 said, "We still need HBCUs because of the long standing tradition of educating students beyond high school." Furthermore, HBCUs make it possible for some students to complete college through nurturing and guidance in a supportive environment." However, she also shared that the relevance is in question due to the selection of students, funding, giving, role models and advisors.

Sandra Walls '72 expressed that HBCUs are still relevant, however, "we must step up our game in meeting the needs of our students, raising standards and expectations of students."

Dorothy Johnson '74 agreed with the relevancy, but believes “the current education system does not effectively prepare students.” She also states that HBCUs are smaller and nurturing for the many challenges facing these students. She recommends an evaluation of current programs to make sure the needs of students are still being met.

Earl Edwards '77 echoes the same message as to the relevancy.

Following are the individual responses to the questions asked to each alum. The responses have been paraphrased to capture the essence of the conversation. I was not able to audio record the responses.

Question #1 – Was your experience at LeMoyne-Owen College mostly positive or mostly negative? Can you give an example?

Overall, the participants stated that they had a positive experience at LeMoyne-Owen College. The common theme among the group was they felt ready to enter the work force after graduation from LOC.

Dorothy Harris, '68 shared that her experience was positive and she established friendships. She indicated that LOC prepared her for a professional career.

Dorothy Johnson, '74 expressed that she was able to develop while on the campus. She also stated that her confidence was instilled and she was nurtured.

Sandra Walls '72 also expressed a positive experience at the College. She was an economics and math major. She worked two full time jobs while attending College. After graduation, she stated that it was hard during that time to get a job in corporate America. As a result, she obtained a Master's degree to help increase her marketability.

Maude Washington '04 stated that she had a positive experience too. She worked for Kellogg's for 30 years and wanted to come back to finish her degree.

Rosalind Davis '92 expressed that during her matriculation at the College, there were many financial issues. She mentioned paying back loans that did not belong to her.

Earl Edwards '77 expressed an overall good experience while attending. However, he did mention an experience that was not positive.

Question # 2 - Two major events of the College are Homecoming and Commencement. This year the College changed homecoming to the fall. Have you attended either of these events in the last 3 years? What brought you back to the College? If no attendance, would you like to share reasons why?

The majority of the participants have not attended both events.

Dorothy Johnson stated she was out of town for both events. She suggested a calendar with all activities.

Sandra Walls indicated that her schedule prevented her attendance.

Rosalind Davis did not attend this year's homecoming activity. But, she did express that homecoming is an opportunity to connect with friends, classmates and sorority sisters.

Dorothy Harris attended both homecoming and commencement 2015

Earl Edwards attended homecoming 2015

Maude Washington attended commencement. She also mentioned that her schedule sometimes prevents her from attending certain events.

Question # 3

President Miller is within her first 100 days of the College. She is talking with several groups to get feedback about the College. She posed this question to the Alumni. What is the College doing well from your perspective? What are recommendations for the College to improve?

All of the participants had positive things to say about the College, but also shared ways to improve to meet the current demands of a College in 2015.

Earl Edwards recommended that the alumni association should have more autonomy when it comes to alumni relations and staff (e.g. OIA). He states that because the college is still in existence that is something we are doing well.

Dorothy Harris recommends that improvements take place in the Alumni Relations area. Also, she mentioned that the landscape of the College is beautiful and the enrollment is up. The College provides a different kind of nurturing. But, African-American giving was another concern.

Dorothy Johnson recommended improvements in freshman orientation. She also suggested other sources of revenue to support the college (e.g. grants) and to develop relationships with outside donors and alumni.

Sandra Walls recommended that instructors lead by example. She also mentioned that there should be higher expectations for our students and create more internship opportunities. She also agreed with the development of the business fraternity (Alpha Kappa Psi).

Rosalind Davis cited that the residence hall was an improvement. She also likes the landscaping for the College. Her recommendation was to re-evaluate the teacher education program. And provide students with life skills, “man and womanhood” and knowing how to adapt in certain situations (“code switching”).

Question # 4

In 2012, the College received a 1.5 million dollar gift from Mrs. Wylodine Taylor Patton. According to the December 2012 edition of “The Magician” newspaper, this was the single largest donation in the College’s 150-year history. LOC has three major fund-raising initiatives: Annual Fund, LOC Sunday and Hank Aaron Celebrity Weekend. Are you familiar with these and have you made a donation to either event? Also, what recommendations would you provide to increase giving from alums.

Donors are the life-blood of nonprofit organizations. All participants agreed that giving is an area that needs improvement.

Dorothy Harris indicated that fundraising efforts should be increased and consider alumni with certain incomes.

Dorothy Johnson stated that asking for a gift is needed along with an acknowledgement in a reasonable amount of time.

Sandra Walls mentioned an UNCF campaign to increase young alumni giving.

Rosalind Davis suggested a marketing campaign about giving, volunteering as a way of giving to college and a mentoring program where alumni can help others.

Maude Washington has requested money from other organizations to help raise funds for the college. And, she mentioned to create a database to maintain current information.

Earl Edwards suggested having an alumni directory and different giving levels.

Question # 5

The Office of Institutional Advancement publishes a magazine, “The Beacon.” Are you receiving the magazine on a consistent basis? What do you think about the frequency of the magazine?

All of the participants have received a copy of the “Beacon Magazine” except Rosalind Davis. She mentioned that it was a “slick publication” and that it is costly to produce.

Dorothy Harris expressed that it could be published quarterly.

Question # 6

The Memphis Chapter meets monthly on Sundays? Have you attended a meeting within the last year? If no, what is your reason for not participating?

Overall participants stated that Sunday was a good meeting time. However, Dorothy Johnson indicated that the meetings were not productive. Earl Edwards expressed meeting organization.

The concluding question was if you could talk to Memphis Chapter President, Jeffrey Higgs and National Alumni President, Clarence Christian what advice would you share with them about improving alumni relations?

One alumni expressed follow-through and consistency with the local chapter. Earl expressed to take an introspective view at the staff of the College.

Dorothy H. asked the question: How to improve the membership in the organization? What can we do to get more alums to join the association?

Rosalind D. wants to discuss more activities and opportunities for volunteerism and community involvement from Alumni giving back to the College. Also, working more with students to help them with professional development seminars, job opportunities, internships and job-readiness.

Dorothy J. send out information within a specific time frame. Invite department chairs to share updates on current activities and new initiatives. Improve communication. (Jeffrey Higgs)

Work to foster better relationships with all chapters (Clarence Christian)

Interpretation and Conclusions

The survey sample was small based on the number of alumni emailed. However, the results did provide enough information to explore ways to make improvements, so it can be as productive as other institutions in the city. The lack of alumni participation suggests that the perception about the College and/or Alumni Association may not be good overall. Additionally, the current structure of the Alumni Association needs to be evaluated. Productive and healthy relationships with staff and alumni should also be taken into consideration as the College moves to the next level. Conduct additional research to get responses from a larger sample of alumni.

Recommendations

An evaluation of current systems and processes within the Alumni Association has to take place. There also has to be a bridge created between older and younger alumni. Develop leaders with new and fresh ideas for the Alumni Association while providing support and direction. Enhance communication between alumni and the Office of Institutional Advancement staff. Focus on team work and ways to attract alumni who have not connected with the College since graduation.

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