

Purpose of Grant Project

The UMaine Alumni Association began and developed several new programs which sought to target engagement activities which would improve the organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The scope of the project sought to first highlight the history of DEI at the University of Maine and to share the voices and experiences of our alumni of color through an expanded MAINE Alumni Magazine. We next sought to engage our alumni of color specifically through the formation of the Alumni of Color (AOC) interest group, establishing a core group, and facilitating a series of meetings. The Association also established new DEI programming and further strengthened existing programs on campus to better support alumni of color and to provide education experiences for the broader community.

Process and Timeline

The AOC was a large focus of this project. Shontay Delalue '00, '03G, Senior Vice President & Senior Diversity Officer for Dartmouth, served as facilitator and advisor of the group. Two broad meetings were held on Zoom in May and June of 2021, with a survey sent afterward. Eight of the 15 May Zoom participants responded to the survey. Questions were open-ended and intended to elicit ideas for future engagement. At the follow-up discussion, which included most of the May attendees and a few first-time participants, members talked about pursuing greater representation of alumni of color on alumni boards and committees and advocacy with the university itself for greater involvement of alumni of color on search committees and advisory boards. One of the suggestions—a brunch event in NYC—was tentatively planned for May 2022 but did not occur due to omicron.

Next, in collaboration with the Greater Bangor Area NAACP we established the Robert Talbot Civil Rights Speaker Series, an annual event which promotes dialogue and engagement

that advances the political, social, educational, and economic equality of all U.S. residents. The inaugural fall event featured *Fighting Time* co-authors Amy Banks and Isaac Knapper.

As a natural extension of the conversations we were having and our relationship with the Greater Bangor NAACP we collaborated on a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day virtual event to commemorate the holiday with the campus community and the state at large. We also began to build on previous DEI programming and partnered with other groups and organizations to lend our database, constituent engagement platform, and Zoom webinar format to put on and promote webinars like “Black Feminism and Me/ME,” “Black Studies in 21st Century Higher Education,” and “Being Black in Maine: Lived Experience and the Prospect for Change.”

Finally, the expanded edition of the magazine highlighted the feature story titled “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” which spotlighted stories and experiences of alumni of color, their perspectives and opinions. It also featured the university’s pledge to create more diversity, equity, and inclusion. Excerpts from the meetings and snippets of interviews with alumni with a range of life experience took part.

Grant Project Budget

The total budget for this extended project came out to \$16,805.92. In order to compensate Dr. Shontay Delalue for her time and expertise, we provided her an honorarium of \$2,500 for her role as facilitator and advisor of the AOC group. In appreciation for the time of those who participated in the discussion meetings we purchased Alumni Association jackets which cost a total of \$1,400.11. For the Robert Talbot Civil Rights Speaker Series we sought to create both an in-person and virtual event for individuals to participate given the impacts still being felt by the pandemic. We employed an outside media company to livestream the event for a total of \$1,600. Honorariums, meals, and plane tickets for the speakers came to a total of \$3,044.73. Event needs

including rental of the space, pipe and drape, invitations, and other needs amounted to \$3,510.68. The expanded edition of the magazine required additional pages and more time from our designer: the spend for this was \$4,000.

Summary of Findings

Through this project the Association learned more about the resilience of our alumni of color and their hopes to make the University of Maine a better, more equitable, and diverse campus. We learned that there was a need for more educational purposes and an eagerness from the campus community to take part in such work. We heard from countless alumni about the impact that the stories and programming had on them, many often asking for more opportunities to learn and interact, and for resources which they could use to continue their efforts.

As for the AOC group, two broad goals were identified that they'd like to address: the ability to advocate with the university and the Alumni Association for the resources and environment UMaine students of color need in order to thrive on campus, graduate on time, and remain connected with others who can help them advance their careers and life interests; and to establish more structured opportunities for alumni across various class years to engage in social and professional networking and mentoring opportunities.

Summary of Conclusion

In closing, we have gained a deep understanding of the needs of our current students and alumni of color. The effects of this group have had an impact internally on our own staff, as we have sought out additional DEI training and continue to try to reach out and lend ourselves to collaboration and partnership. We are confident that the campus community, our alumni community, and the community at large will continue to engage, learn and grow through this programming. In being able to effectuate all of the goals of the grant project, we found that the

impacts of the pandemic and its effect on the campus community affected our ability to complete some aspects. It is our hope that 2023 will provide further opportunity to build on and expand what we started with this DEI initiative. Plans are currently underway for the 2022 Robert Talbot Speaker Series and the 2023 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event; it is our hope to increase awareness and attendance of each event and to deepen our relationship with the Greater Bangor Area NAACP and BIPOC student groups on campus. As mentioned earlier in the summary, a May 2022 brunch was underway to bring the AOC group in-person to New York City, an area with a large group of concentrated alumni, but the rise of omicron cases at the time unfortunately put that plan on pause. In addition, we hope to create a pipeline between the AOC group and students of color to serve as resources and a source of mentorship for current students.

Summary of Future Impacts

The impacts of this project are far-reaching for the University of Maine, current students, and its alumni. As a predominantly white institution we knew at the onset of this grant project that we had a lot of work to do but hope that our continued efforts will help alumni and students of color feel seen and heard by their alma mater. The establishment of the AOC group will provide a space and venue for our alumni of color to share their perspectives and enact change both on campus and beyond for years to come. The connections created through the civil rights speaker series, development of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event, and relationships fostered with the Greater Bangor Area Branch NAACP and various BIPOC student groups on campus helped situate the Association as a resource and partner for collaboration. We hope to continue to grow the Alumni of Color group and establish a pipeline for connection with current students of color to be a better, more equitable organization for years to come.