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## Q&A with Antigone Blackwell



*Antigone Blackwell is using her skills as a fundraiser, and her passion for diversity and access, to raise money for programs at UC San Diego that attract the best and brightest students from underrepresented communities. As the Director of Development for Diversity Initiatives, she has been working with students, faculty and staff all over campus, and individuals and groups in the community, to identify, cultivate and steward major gift prospects for various diversity activities. She came to UC San Diego from DePaul University in Chicago, where access was part of the school's mission. In this interview, she talks about her priorities, the importance of collaboration, and the challenges and opportunities she faces.*

### **What is your role as the Director of Development for Diversity Initiatives?**

**Blackwell:** My role is to develop and manage fundraising programs that garner needed funding to attract, support and retain highly qualified underrepresented students. Many of my goals — such as seeking funding for the OASIS Summer Bridge Program, student-led yield programs, the African-American Studies and Chicano/a Latino /a Arts and Humanities minors — were priorities identified by UC San Diego and its Campus Climate Council. I also provide programmatic support for the campus' three community centers — the LGBT Resource Center, the Cross-Cultural Center and the Women's Center.

Diversity is a broad, multi-layered concept. Therefore, fundraising for diversity initiatives is a fluid process that is ever-evolving with each connection that I make. I am fortunate to have experience as a development officer raising money for diversity initiatives, so I have strong ideas about the efforts that need to be made. I also feel strongly about collaboration, and I've been heartened by the wealth of optimism, knowledge and creativity that people have brought to the table over the past few months. My original ideas have been greatly enriched as a result of this collaboration with students, faculty and staff.

### **How are you prioritizing your fundraising for diversity initiatives?**

**Blackwell:** I took the first 90 days to meet and collaborate with students, staff, faculty and alumni to identify efforts that are taking place on campus and out in the community. The purpose was to identify what the constituencies considered their highest priorities so I could effectively construct creative ways to thread them together. My department is small, requiring that I set up a streamlined and efficient infrastructure that will allow me to yield fundraising results as soon as possible. Fundraising requires identification of prospective donors and volunteers who will assist with that effort. Once that is established, the creation of proper communication, marketing, events planning and individualized outreach strategies must be aligned so that you can effectively reach your short- and long-term goals.

As a major gifts officer, I've learned to set reasonable expectations for people that I serve — and that it takes time. Everyone has been very understanding, but, in the meantime, I'm working enthusiastically with my colleagues in Corporate and Foundation Relations in an effort to generate grant support. It's a numbers game, yielding a 10 percent success rate, but one or two successful hits make it worth the effort. I'm also promoting our Diversity Support website which is at [giving.ucsd.edu/diversity](http://giving.ucsd.edu/diversity).

**How important is it to you to collaborate with students, faculty and staff, in order to fundraise and raise awareness about diversity initiatives?**

**Blackwell:** I was immediately humbled by the commitment demonstrated by the broad range of people both within and outside of UC San Diego. My position requires extensive collaborations with colleagues in Development and Alumni Relations, as well as a broad range of students, staff and faculty. On my first day, I hit the ground running with the expertise and support of my colleagues who are an integral part of my fundraising team.

One thing that I noticed relatively early in my tenure was how many people are woefully unaware of what UC San Diego has been doing in the community. Despite the fact that UC San Diego has numerous community outreach programs and was recognized by the Corporation for National and Community Service with the "2010 President's Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction," most people in the San Diego community are unaware of the impact the university has on the region. The San Diego community is particularly unaware of the services that we provide in underrepresented areas within the city and county.

Professionals employed and studying at academic institutions have a broad knowledge and skill base enveloped with rich resources, all of which make collaboration natural. UC San Diego promotes these collaborations and partnerships, not only among faculty, staff and students, but also with nonprofits and corporations. It is my job to serve as a link to streamline and maximize results, so we can support and enrich the educational experience of our students.

**Why should people invest in diversity initiatives?**

**Blackwell:** The nationwide effort to support diversity in higher education has become a strong priority due to the understanding of inclusion's impact on educational advancement and economic sustainability for society as a whole. The vast majority of people understand that higher education is the engine of societal advancement and economic growth. Due to this fundamental fact, accessibility is key.

Because inclusion broadens the range of thinkers, due to the unique perspectives and experiences that we all bring, access to a quality education benefits the economically and socially underserved, and society as a whole. Each person's unique experiences create a tapestry of thoughts and innovations that serve as the backbone of educational advancement. We accept that academicians build upon the experiences and studies of their colleagues, so we must also accept that diversity from life experiences is an essential component in the classroom, in research and in the workforce.

You may interpret my first justification as idealistic, but I have a much more pragmatic reason. Diversity is an economic imperative. In California, for instance, the majority of our primary and secondary-aged school children are Chicano/Latino. If this group is not properly represented in all levels of society, our economic strength will be severely compromised. I understand and embrace the higher standards set by the University of California system, and believe that it should not be compromised. Yet extremely bright young people are being overlooked due to the inequities at the primary and secondary educational level. This is highly frustrating for me. But it has been inspiring to discover that many people at UC San Diego are also frustrated, and they're doing something about it.

UC San Diego is making a difference, and many departments and students alike are working diligently to broaden and enrich our impact. This is evidenced by the creation of The Preuss School and outreach efforts that are taking place at Gompers Preparatory Academy, Lincoln High School, and other primary and secondary schools in San Diego.

### **What challenges and opportunities are you coming across?**

**Blackwell:** My role is unique compared to my colleagues because it is so ubiquitous — diversity is a priority in almost every department on campus, which makes setting goals a unique challenge. When I began, I realized that the breadth and scope of my duties would require that I tackle several priorities simultaneously. I made it a goal to meet with people who were already entrenched in the diversity initiatives. The most immediate challenge is the fact that all of the programs that I'm seeking funding for are in an infancy stage in terms of fundraising. We are still working hard to get many systems into place.

California, like many states, is suffering from budget cuts, which has had an enormous impact on programs at universities. While this is both disheartening and unfortunate, it should not deter departments from the noble efforts that they are pursuing. As this issue relates to diversity, I have met with several companies who understand the importance of diversity and are invested in supporting our initiatives. And I look forward to the day when UC San Diego, and similar campuses nationwide, will evolve to the point where diversity efforts are not considered separate "initiatives," but become a part of the campus culture.

## **Fun Faves**

### **Favorite place at UC San Diego:**

The Loft

### **Favorite place on Earth:**

My uncle's backyard with family in July

### **Favorite hobby:**

Writing, when I get the opportunity

### **Favorite food:**

In my 20's, it was freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, but now it's been downgraded to Chocolate Caramel Atkins bars

### **Favorite way to spend \$10:**

The movies; I'll always love the magic of the big screen

### **Favorite words to live by:**

"We must be the change we want to see." - Mahatma Gandhi

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