Communicating Our Diversity

Anitra Cottledge
Director of Communications
Office for Equity and Diversity
University of Minnesota
“You cannot not communicate.”

--Paul Watzlawik
Goals

I. Explore the idea of a “diversity brand” and understand the challenges of creating one

II. Recognize best practices and identify strategies for successfully communicating about equity and diversity

III. Consider next steps for you and for your unit/dept. around communicating diversity
Brand = Communication Shorthand
#RaceTogether

Jamil Smith @JamilSmith
The only folks happy about Starbucks baristas discussing race with customers are the suits who run it. Feel-good liberalism at its worst.
10:14 PM - 16 Mar 2015
374 RETWEETS 357 FAVORITES

Jessica Misener @jessmisener
if only Selma had just put in a starbucks
8:54 AM - 17 Mar 2015
50 RETWEETS 79 FAVORITES
Why Diversity Branding Matters

- Enhances the connection/engagement with your constituents
- Promotes your DNA--mission and vision
- Showcases recognition/points of pride
- Helps create clarity and focus for your work
- Sets you apart from the competition
- Provides your “business” value

(Antonelli, 2013)
Challenges

• Higher education professionals wear many hats
• Often focused on day-to-day management/initiatives
  – Need for more infrastructure/greater capacity
• Little time for effective communication
  – Lack of clarity around key messages and goals
  – Focused on event marketing (as opposed to strategy)
General Best Practices

• Be mindful of your audience(s) and methods
• Carefully consider responses to biased/offensive communication
• Pay attention to language

Photo courtesy of S. Deragon, identityprojectsf.com
Strategy #1: Congruence

- Align your communications tactics with your organizational values
  - Congruency informs authenticity
  - Remember: your audience is savvy
  - There is value in communicating about areas in need of improvement (as long as you follow through with action)

NEWS » CAMPUS

In hiring, officials seek to rid unintentional bias
The University is continuing a plan that aims to improve the school’s hiring processes.
Strategy #2: Creativity

- Think beyond brochures and flyers.
  - Don’t rely only on visual representation.
  - Profile stories/press releases about points of pride/accolades/signature initiatives
  - The ways in which you organize your space, collaborative relationships you have in place, etc.

GUIDELINES for Accessible Meetings and Events

1. Attitudinal Access
   - Always ask what accommodations are desired — individuals who use wheelchairs may be more or less mobile than you suspect, not all individuals who are blind read Braille, and not all individuals who are deaf use ASL.
   - When interacting with or asking questions of an individual with a disability, speak directly to that individual.
   - It is okay to use words such as walk, hear, and see.
Strategy #3: Collaboration

• Build communications partnerships
  – Develop relationships with key stakeholders/media personnel
  – Leverage in-house expertise
  – Work collaboratively to address issues/crises
Strategy #4: Check In

- Assess your strategies
  - Number of: stories placed, social media followers, program attendees, etc.
  - Opinion shifts within target audiences
  - Strategic collaborations
  - Policy/program changes

(Quiroz, 2013)
In Review

• **Be congruent** with your organizational values and mission.
• Explore **creative** ways to tell your diversity story.
• Relationships w/ **collaborators** enhance communications.
• **Check in** regularly to see if your communication strategies are meeting your goals.
Next Steps

Consider a context where you might be involved in communicating about equity and diversity (e.g., your own unit or department; an initiative in which you are involved; or your own personal commitment)

• What are – and should be – the next steps around communicating a commitment to equity and diversity?

• What role can – and should – you play in the communication of this commitment?
Thank You!

Anitra Cottledge
Director of Communications
Office for Equity and Diversity
University of Minnesota
cottlead@umn.edu

Twitter: @acottledge