

**Understanding Outreach and Engagement among Underrepresented
Fulbright Association Alumni**

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From Jim

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Executive Summary

Our capstone sought to answer the following problem of practice: How can the Fulbright Association increase engagement within their alumni organization, and particularly among underrepresented Fulbright alumni?

The principal site for this study was the Fulbright Association, which serves as the official U.S. alumni organization of the Fulbright study abroad program. Established in 1977, the Fulbright Association (2021b) mission is to support the Fulbright heritage of education, advocacy, and service. The association is committed to operating as an intercultural educational exchange for mutual understanding and a catalyst for peace in the world. While the Association formally represents nearly 140,000 members, less than 9,000 are current dues-paying members (M. Sayegh, personal communication, May 20, 2021). By increasing alumni participation, particularly among underrepresented Fulbright alumni, the Fulbright Association hoped to better reflect the diversity of their alumni members, better serve their membership, and increase overall engagement in Fulbright alumni programs and activities.

The conceptual framework we utilized for our capstone was developed by Dr. Kevin Fleming (2019). Because of its five central elements of alumni engagement (personal value, perceived institutional integrity, connectedness, commitment, and sense of fulfillment), Fleming's framework helped us to examine how Fulbright's underrepresented alumni viewed their relationship with the Fulbright Association and how such views impact their level of current and future engagement within the organization. Using a qualitative research approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eight underrepresented Fulbright members, two Fulbright Association leaders, and three outside experts in the field of alumni relations. The intent of the research was to identify both the challenges limiting engagement by Fulbright

Alumni members and the opportunities to increase engagement within the Association, particularly among underrepresented Fulbright alumni. The findings may assist similar alumni associations in the development of more effective alumni engagement strategies.

The first research question addressed underrepresented Fulbright alumni's engagement with the Association. The eight underrepresented Fulbright alumni described engagement specifically in terms of connection (Finding 1). The alumni described their engagement as being affirmed as underrepresented (Finding 2). They also described engagement as occurring by asserting themselves to gain leadership positions within local Fulbright chapters and experiencing community through Fulbright affinity groups (Finding 3).

For our second research question addressing what the Association can do to increase alumni engagement among underrepresented alumni, the underrepresented Fulbright alumni suggested the Association could improve its data collection efforts to generate informed communication, programming, and outreach efforts (Finding 4). Next, both underrepresented Fulbright alumni and outside alumni experts expressed strong support for implementing career-oriented guidance and mentoring programs (Finding 5) as well as affinity programs (Finding 6) to improve alumni engagement and overall Association outreach (Finding 7).

Three recommendations for the Fulbright Association emerged from the research findings. First, the Fulbright Association should provide greater support and resources to affinity groups for underrepresented Fulbright alumni members. Second, the Fulbright Association should incorporate ongoing career-oriented guidance and mentoring offerings into its alumni programming. Third, the Fulbright Association should expand data gathering and analysis capacity to improve strategic planning, organizational effectiveness, and alumni outreach and engagement. Finally, underrepresented alumni reported strong support for the Fulbright

Association and its future. The overarching positive support for the Fulbright Program and the Fulbright Association suggests there is an excellent opportunity to increase both its overall and underrepresented alumni's engagement.

Introduction

The partner organization is the Fulbright Association. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Fulbright Association is the U.S. alumni organization for the Fulbright study abroad program. Many people are familiar with the Fulbright study abroad program that is managed by the Institute of International Education (2021) on behalf of the U.S. Department of State. The program is the largest U.S. exchange program which allows students to participate in academic coursework, research, or teaching opportunities worldwide. More than 2,000 Fulbright grants are awarded annually, and the program operates in more than 140 countries around the world. The Fulbright study abroad program celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2021 (Fulbright Association, 2021b).

Most importantly to our partner organization, the Fulbright study abroad program produces U.S. alumni eligible for alumni membership in the Fulbright Association after participating in the Fulbright study abroad program. With a mission that seeks to extend and expand the Fulbright tradition of education, advocacy, and service, the Fulbright Association (2021b) offers a wide variety of programming to alumni members that includes service projects at home and abroad, an array of networking events and social activities, as well as lifelong learning opportunities.

The Fulbright Association (2021b) represents more than 140,000 alumni. However, the Association counts only 8,405 current dues-paying members. Of these members, only 456 members have participated in at least one Fulbright Association event over the last year (M. Sayegh, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Improving the outreach to and engagement of their alumni is a primary challenge confronting the Fulbright Association. To do so, the Fulbright Association sought knowledge of

existing research and literature on alumni engagement and best practices associated with alumni outreach. While alumni engagement is not a new problem for higher education-affiliated non-profit organizations like the Fulbright Association, pressure has been increasing on such groups to strengthen their organizations by connecting more authentically with their existing members and potential members (Toyn, 2020). As a result of growing concerns related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in recent years, alumni organizations have also paid much greater attention to the diversity of their members.

The Fulbright Association has been specifically focused on addressing the EDI issues in their organization and within the Fulbright study abroad program in general. The diversity of U.S. students studying abroad is a challenge, as recent data indicated. Only 31% of study abroad participants are underrepresented students when U.S. college students identifying as members of non-White ethnic groups are at 44% and growing (Open Doors, 2020). Discussions with the leadership of the Fulbright Association have revealed that increasing the participation of underrepresented students is vital to the growth and success of both the Fulbright U.S. study abroad program and their alumni organization.

Based on initial conversations with the leadership of the Fulbright Association, it was evident that they seek to develop a comprehensive strategy or plan to address their outreach and engagement challenges. The research findings in this qualitative case study aim to provide helpful insight into the motivation and behaviors of current and underrepresented alumni members. This information combined with our literature review can be used to support Fulbright Association efforts to enhance alumni outreach and engagement throughout their organization and specifically among underrepresented alumni members, who likely identify as persons of color or as not White, such as Latino or Hispanic, Black or African American, etc. (Perdue,

2018; Princeton University, 2015). Additionally, underrepresented populations tend to be defined as those groups that are inadequately represented in U.S. colleges and universities compared to their representation in the general population (Allen et al., 2019).

Organizational Context

Established on February 27, 1977, the Fulbright Association is based in Washington, D.C., and is led by a 26-member Board of Directors and a full-time staff of six (Institute of International Education, 2021). The association represents approximately 140,000 U.S. alumni of the Fulbright study abroad program, 75 years of Fulbrighters since that program's inception. Fulbright alumni include leaders in a variety of fields and professions. Their ranks include 82 Pulitzer Prize winners, 59 Nobel Prize laureates, 37 current or former heads of state or government, 70 MacArthur Foundation Fellows, and 16 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients. (Fulbright Association, 2021a).

The Fulbright Association has 54 local alumni chapters and 8,405 current dues-paying members. They also have 240 institutional members, which primarily includes U.S. colleges and universities. The Fulbright Association and their local chapters host more than 230 regional and national programs each year for their U.S. alumni members and visiting Fulbrighters to the United States (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021).

Fulbright Association programs include educational events, seminars, music and art presentations, networking events, and a variety of volunteer activities. The Association also administers two competitive grant programs for alumni, including a chapter grant program and a grant that supports Fulbright in the Classroom. This program allows Fulbright alumni to share their study abroad experiences with elementary and secondary school students (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021). Through such programs, the Fulbright Association

seeks to engage its alumni members and to continue to foster a community that reflects the Association's commitment to international education, diversity, and culture.

Since the Fulbright alumni come from thousands of public and private universities in the United States, the Fulbright Association naturally has a close working relationship with U.S. higher education institutions. Like its counterparts in higher education, the Fulbright Association actively promotes and supports education, advocacy, and service. The Association also has a shared commitment to increasing alumni outreach and engagement and growing its alumni bases (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021).

The academy and the leadership within such higher education institutions are just one of many stakeholders for this project. The Fulbright Association Executive Director and senior staff are certainly key stakeholders. Experts and leaders in alumni relations are important stakeholders and contributors to our research. Additionally, Fulbright Association alumni, Fulbright Association chapter leaders, and Fulbright Study Abroad Program participants are also valuable stakeholders.

We used this capstone research to produce findings to better inform all stakeholders, particularly the Fulbright Association's senior leadership, on effective alumni outreach and engagement strategies for underrepresented alumni members. Given the data related to the current level of alumni participation in association activities, our findings hopefully revealed helpful tactics for increasing alumni engagement. By utilizing qualitative interviews, existing research and literature on alumni engagement, and best practices associated with alumni outreach, we aimed to address our specific problem of practice and provide the Fulbright Association with tangible ways to improve and grow their underrepresented alumni outreach and engagement strategies.

Problem of Practice

The specific problem of practice of the Fulbright Association involved a lack of overall alumni member engagement within their association. This problem of practice was particularly apparent among underrepresented association members, who highlighted the current lack of diversity within the Fulbright Association, an issue the Association leadership also sought to address. Thoroughly examining this two-fold problem of practice was essential to derive effective strategies and approaches and to address the specific outreach and engagement challenges confronting the Fulbright Association.

The Fulbright Association leadership indicated that their current alumni engagement and participation rate in association events and activities was low. Out of 140,000 eligible alumni members, only 8,405 (17%) are active dues-paying members. Of those 8,405 alumni members, only 456 (18%) participated in at least one Fulbright Association event or activity during the last year (M. Sayegh, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Additionally, both Fulbright Association leadership and current Fulbright Association alumni members sought to increase diversity among association membership. This shared commitment to diversity reflected the stated mission and values of the Fulbright Association (2021b) and the Fulbright study abroad program, both of which strongly embraced intercultural exchange and diversity. Furthermore, the significant increase in social justice efforts and public protests related to diversity and inclusion at home and abroad added urgency to the call for such change in recent years.

As we learned through our review of the literature and our interview with alumni experts, the challenge of alumni engagement was not a challenge unique to the Fulbright Association. Current national rates of alumni engagement and participation have dropped overall (Wawzenek,

2020). In fact, 62% of U.S. alumni organizations reported that both their primary challenge and primary goal for the last fiscal year was increased alumni engagement (Toyn, 2020). While we found less literature specifically addressing underrepresented alumni engagement, research examining U.S. study abroad rates by race and ethnicity has been conducted. We gained further relevant data through interviews with underrepresented alumni members and alumni experts.

It is important to note that the Fulbright Association has taken a variety of steps to address the challenge of alumni engagement, particularly among underrepresented alumni members. In October of 2020, the Fulbright Association hosted its 43rd Annual Conference, which focused significantly on the issues of race, diversity, and civil rights. The conference theme was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s final book titled "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?" Moreover, the Association has encouraged underrepresented alumni members to participate in their Fulbright in the Classroom program to share their study-abroad experiences with K-12 students (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021). The Fulbright Association (2021a) also shares similar experiences of underrepresented alumni members in their current video series, "Fulbright Stories," to highlight individual alumni as part of the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright Study Abroad Program (M. Sayegh, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

Regardless of such efforts to connect with disengaged alumni and improve alumni involvement effectively, outreach and engagement practices must continually evolve and improve (Fleming, 2019; Princeton University, 2015). This increased outreach is vital for gaining the attention of underrepresented alumni members (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). While many strategies to address alumni engagement challenges have been recommended, more focus

on the specific tactics for successfully reaching underrepresented alumni and the ability to implement them is necessary (Tierney, 1999).

Literature Review

The Fulbright Association is closely linked to higher education through its work and mission. Individual U.S. colleges and universities account for hundreds of the current institutional members of the Fulbright Association (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021). Additionally, the organizational structure of the Fulbright Association and its approach to alumni engagement is most similar to that of many higher education alumni organizations (S. Akram, personal communication, March 18, 2021). Accordingly, this literature review focuses on research, articles, and concepts specifically related to higher education alumni organizations.

Nearly 6,000 alumni organizations operate in the United States (Nonprofit Metrics, 2021). The vast majority of these organizations are public and private colleges and universities. Other entities are directly connected to or provide services and support associated with higher education (Toyn, 2020). These organizations generate revenue in excess of \$1 billion each year and maintain assets totaling more than \$5 billion (Nonprofit Metrics, 2021).

Alumni Fundraising and Outreach

As the number of such alumni organizations continues to grow, there is an increasing focus in the literature on two specific concepts: fundraising and alumni outreach and engagement (Toyn, 2020). Many alumni organizations in the United States exist within and operate out of an advancement or development structure primarily focused on fundraising and revenue generation (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003). Subsequently, considerable literature focuses on the importance of fundraising and its role in overall alumni outreach and engagement (Mann, 2007).

Outreach and engagement are essential components of every alumni organization (Gasman & Bowman, 2013). These cultivation practices result in the funding, resources, and volunteers that are the lifeblood of alumni organizations (Freeman, 2021). Wawzenek (2020) explained that outreach and engagement efforts are critical to both the long-term sustainability of alumni organizations and the ability to serve their members effectively.

As the need for operating revenue has increased in such organizations, fundraising and development have become the priority of many alumni organizations, superseding alumni outreach, contact, and engagement (Cates, 2021). Toyn (2020) states that such increased focus and attention upon fundraising and revenue generation by many organizations risks sidelining efforts to develop and improve alumni engagement practices.

As the literature reveals, such alumni cultivation and engagement practices are viewed as a critical step in donor identification and development (Toyn, 2020). Weerts and Ronca (2008) and Gallo (2013a) assert that effective alumni outreach and engagement are necessary precursors to successful fundraising and improved revenue generation. Focusing on alumni solely for fundraising purposes often inhibits the critical connections established through early and authentic engagement and that eventually may foster greater giving (Cates, 2021).

Alumni Engagement

Alumni volunteerism, outreach, and engagement are understudied, particularly in fundraising practices (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). However, there are recurring and revealing concepts in articles and studies related to alumni engagement. These include relationships, motivation, and loyalty (Cates, 2021).

The relationships between alumni and their institutions are often the sole determiners of whether alumni remain actively engaged in their alumni organizations (Newman & Petrosko,

2011). As the literature reveals, alumni who have had satisfactory experiences as students and have been positively connected with the institution since departure are more likely to display strong relationships with the alumni association (Pearson, 1999). Alumni activities play an important role in the quality of the relationship between alumni and institutions. Activities valued by alumni and positively linked to the mission of the institution and viewed as meaningful are more likely to cause alumni to have enduring and beneficial connections that encourage alumni engagement (Olsen, 2018).

The motivation of alumni plays a critical role in whether they actively engage in their alumni organizations (Lucka, 2015). Alumni's individual beliefs most impact motivation and decisions to engage with alumni associations. Clary and Snyder (1999) created an instrument to assess six specific functions served by volunteering, including values, understanding, enhancement, career, social, and protective functions. They determined that participants who received a message that matched their motivation engaged positively with their association (Clary & Snyder, 1999). These personal motivations inform the actions of alumni with their alumni organizations and ultimately impact overall alumni engagement levels (Fleming, 2019).

The issue of loyalty influences alumni engagement (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Olsen, 2018). As the literature indicates, alumni associations should focus their attention on nurturing relationships with their members to maintain a loyal and engaged alumni base (Gallo, 2012). Drezner and Huehls (2014) equate such efforts by alumni organizations with relationship marketing, in which organizations establish long-term relationships with alumni to maintain their loyalty and active engagement.

While all of these concepts impact underrepresented Fulbright alumni, the literature noted the unique challenges associated with engaging such alumni and additional relevant terms and

concepts to explore. Several recurring concepts and terms became apparent in our research. They include belonging, affinity, mentoring, and data.

Belonging

Soria and Stebleton (2013) stated that the culture, experiences, and circumstances in the lives of underrepresented alumni influence their identity, impact their sense of belonging, and determine their engagement within organizations. As Freeman (2021) explained, the past microaggressions and alienation experienced by underrepresented individuals often impede active engagement. Such transgressions could have occurred as part of the student experience, resulting in underrepresented individuals seeking explanations for such mistreatment from the alumni organization (Gasman & Bowman, 2013).

In research of underrepresented alumni, Lucka (2015) reported that most of these alumni experienced a lack of voice within the institution, little meaningful engagement, and a failure to nurture their sense of belonging. Freeman (2021) related that underrepresented alumni continuously seek verification that they still belong and have value within the organization. The feedback they receive ultimately impacts their motivation and determines their level of engagement (Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

Given this context, Gallo (2012) supported outreach and engagement of underrepresented students at the very beginning of their college experiences. Such efforts immediately create a sense of belonging and of a welcoming, inclusive culture that begins to establish the lifelong alumni relationship that the Association seeks (Gallo, 2013b). Inclusion and belonging particularly matter to younger students and alumni, and such efforts can be pivotal in determining their future engagement levels (Toyn, 2020). However, engagement strategies must

be specifically targeted to underrepresented alumni to be effective, as broad routine approaches often fail to connect (Hawkins, 2014).

Affinity Groups

Establishing a sense of belonging within an organization can often create a meaningful connection or affinity with underrepresented members (Mann, 2007). As the literature reflected, affinity groups allow alumni to become involved with a subgroup to whom they have a very personal connection (Gallo, 2012). Successful affinity groups tend to have greater student involvement among organizations with broad demographic appeal (Bae et al., 2016).

Levitz (2015) stated that affinity groups experiencing the greatest level of success were those groups that included members with more diverse backgrounds. The literature we reviewed supported affinity groups being composed of diverse members for creating stronger communities (Gallo, 2012). Ruben (2019) reported that affinity groups expand participation within their alumni organizations and increase overall alumni engagement.

Given such findings, Cabrales (2013) states that alumni organizations should actively seek to develop ethnically-based affinity groups. While the literature reflects that some alumni organizations fear the growth of affinity groups could decrease overall engagement in central alumni activities, affinity groups have increasingly been found to assist associations in their alumni recruitment and engagement efforts (Bae et al., 2016; Cabrales, 2013). Affinity organizations at the University of Pennsylvania now include groups for Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, and LGBTQ+ communities, and overall participation in general alumni activities has increased (Ruben, 2019). Volin and Bustinza (2017) reported similar findings at Lewis University in Illinois, at which members of the three largest affinity groups at the

university continued to increase their engagement with the general alumni population and financial giving levels.

Mentoring

The literature reflected that career services, and specifically mentoring, are also effective in engaging underrepresented alumni members (Lucka, 2015). Toyn (2020) reported that a growing number of U.S. alumni organizations have embraced mentoring and sought to align alumni relations and career services functions more closely. Mentoring of underrepresented populations has proven particularly effective in enhancing diversity and inclusion efforts and increasing overall engagement (Allen et al., 2019).

Mentoring programs are particularly appealing offerings for underrepresented and young alumni (Cabrales, 2013; Perdue, 2018). An alumni survey by Yale University in 2011 that drew more than 900 replies found that millennials (age 32 and under) specifically requested mentoring and other career services (Edersheim, 2021). Lucka (2015) reported similar support for mentoring programs specifically among underrepresented alumni.

The promotion of alumni mentoring and career service programs has increased with the use of social media and digital platforms (Cabrales, 2013). The focus on engaging underrepresented mentors and mentees has also increased as diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have expanded within institutions (Freeman, 2021). Additionally, Wawzenek (2020) reports that an increased focus on alumni mentoring and other career services is anticipated to expand due to the economic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data

Data can be the most resourceful tool that alumni organizations can employ to increase alumni engagement, particularly among underrepresented alumni members (Lucka, 2015). It is

challenging to address the needs of underrepresented and less engaged alumni members if an organization does not know who their underrepresented alumni are and what their specific concerns are. Access to reliable data allows organizations to understand their underrepresented alumni better, particularly the alumni's skills, abilities, and interests (Yosso, 2005).

Social media and other digital platforms provide alumni organizations with effective ways to connect and communicate with their alumni members. Technology platforms also can provide highly useful data on alumni members. Such data, particularly related to underrepresented alumni members' social and behavioral habits, can better inform alumni engagement strategies and potentially lead to greater alumni participation (Coleman, 2016).

In addition to social media and digital platforms, alumni organizations should also pursue other data gathering opportunities seeking to engage underrepresented alumni members successfully. Many alumni organizations regularly conduct extensive alumni surveys to glean actionable information. Such surveys sometimes return negative information, but this approach is recognized as producing valuable information that can improve alumni engagement (Toyn, 2020). Wawzenek (2020) reported that such a survey at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) demonstrated that alumni over the age of 50 were unhappy with current alumni programs. This finding allowed the UCLA alumni association to craft popular new programs specifically tailored to the stated interests of alumni in this age group (Wawzenek, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

To better understand how Fulbright alumni engage with the Association, we applied the concepts in Fleming's (2019) framework for alumni engagement. The framework contains five central concepts that Fleming termed "pots of water." The five pots are factors that determine alumni engagement and relational development: (1) personal values, (2) perceived institutional

integrity, (3) connectedness, (4) commitment, and (5) sense of fulfillment. Fleming's recently developed five-pot framework for understanding alumni engagement is important for this study because it highlights specific aspects of engagement, providing greater specificity to understand and improve alumni engagement. Fleming's five-pot framework addresses personal values, identity, culture, climate, advocacy, inclusion, fulfillment, and meaningful connection, which are areas described as essential to alumni involvement and commitment. Much of what has been written on alumni engagement centers on the importance of a positive experience as the most important factor in continued alumni support (Pearson, 1999); however, our study examined how underrepresented alumni in Fulbright, with varying levels of connection and engagement, could potentially be strengthened. Our application of this recently developed framework represented a seminal opportunity to apply it with underrepresented alumni of a prestigious organization.

Fleming (2019) defined engagement as the "coalescence of beliefs, thoughts, actions, and emotions about and towards their alma mater, and an individual's level of engagement is the degree to which they come together" (p. 112). Fleming described alumni engagement using the metaphor of "pots of water," as each of the subcategory pots (e.g., core experiences or innate beliefs) moderate the temperature of each of the five pots (e.g., personal values, connectedness). Consequently, each of the five pots can further heat or cool the overall pot, that is, the overall level of engagement among alumni.

Alumni engagement with the Association has serious and consequential implications for a critical objective of the U.S. Department of State's Fulbright Program to foster diversity and inclusion (Institute of International Education, 2021). However, and considering what underrepresented communities face in society today, including their experiences traveling abroad with Fulbright, the Association must assess its commitment to the alumni and the level of

engagement it seeks to generate to ensure that future underrepresented Fulbrighters enjoy positive experiences and increased engagement.

Alumni also possess innate beliefs about what an institution should be and do—and who it should serve. They use their value systems to assess the organization’s effectiveness; personal values thus become the lens by which alumni “view their alma mater and provide the evaluative criteria that give meaning to their relationship with it” (Fleming, 2019, p. 115). Next, alumni consistently evaluate the integrity of their alma mater. This “perceived institutional integrity” is simply the alignment of the qualities alumni believe the institution should possess to what it does possess, judging from opportunities the organization presents to communicate what it is and what it does—such as email campaigns, websites, institutional-sponsored events, and public statements in support of alumni. Moreover, these beliefs about the organization’s integrity are shaped by how alumni feel the institution and community create a sense of belonging and encouragement to participate.

Active participation among underrepresented groups in the Fulbright Association is essential to applying each of the five central concepts of the pots of water, to the recruitment of new Fulbright study abroad candidates, and to the perception of the organization as a premier supporter of “international education and cultural understanding around the world” (Fulbright Association, 2021b, para. 4). Similar to an institution of higher education, Fulbright study abroad offers an educational experience to its participants and the Fulbright Association seeks to build strong connections with its alumni thereafter to support the future of the program and to attract candidates of diverse backgrounds. The five-pot framework provided a foundation to better understand alumni engagement and the strength of the relationships underrepresented

Fulbright alumni might feel toward the Association and formed the opportunity to discover how their engagement could be improved.

Research Questions

Two research questions were developed to enable the Fulbright Association to understand the experiences of underrepresented Fulbright alumni and to provide guidance to bolster the outreach and engagement approaches toward these alumni. As stated in the problem of practice, the Fulbright Association wanted to improve engagement with their underrepresented alumni. In order to improve alumni engagement, an understanding of the alumni's perceptions and experiences regarding the Association as relating to the five central concepts of alumni engagement was needed. The first research question asked: How do underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe engagement with the Fulbright association? The second research question asked: What can the Association do to increase alumni engagement among underrepresented alumni? The first question was designed to obtain an overall assessment of underrepresented alumni's engagement and relationship with the Association. The second research question allowed for using the interview data to form the recommendations for improving engagement among Fulbright alumni. The questions applied Fleming's (2019) pots of water framework for alumni engagement.

Study Design

The research questions presented in this case study were answered using semi-structured interviews, triangulated through data collection sampling of sources representing the perspective and account of experiences of underrepresented Fulbright alumni, Fulbright Association staff, and experts from the field of alumni affairs. The first research question asked: How do underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe engagement with the Fulbright association? The

second research question asked: What can the Association do to increase alumni engagement among underrepresented alumni? Table 1 shows the connection between the study design, sources of data, and research questions.

Table 1

Summary of Study Design

Research Question	Sources of Data	Method
How do underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe their relationship and/or engagement with the Fulbright association?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni • Fulbright Association staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews
What can the Association do to increase alumni engagement among underrepresented alumni?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underrepresented Fulbright alumni • Literature on alumni engagement • Experts in the field of alumni affairs • Fulbright association staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interviews • Review of literature

Instruments

The interview questions were designed within each of the five categories that measure alumni engagement as described in Fleming’s (2019) “Pots of Water” Framework for Alumni Engagement. Appendix A contains the interview script and questions that guided the Fulbright alumni interviews. Appendix B has the guide we used for interviewing the alumni affairs experts. Appendix C presents the interview guide and script for the Association staff interviews. The interview protocols were reviewed by a Vanderbilt professor with expertise in research design and diversity. Additionally, the interview protocols were reviewed by a leader of a local Fulbright Association chapter to ensure the questions were reasonable, clear, relevant to the alumni, and aligned with the goals of the project.

The interview guides were developed to fulfill two distinct objectives: (1) to sample the interview participants' perspectives within each of the five "Pots of Water" categories and (2) to solicit recommendations for improving alumni engagement with either the Fulbright Association or the local chapters. Recommendation questions were asked last to prime participants to be thinking about their experiences in their responses using Fleming's framework during the first portion of each interview. In addition, questions were included in both the alumni and association leadership interviews to address their thoughts on improvement opportunities for increasing engagement of underrepresented Fulbright Alumni.

Participant Recruitment

Alumni

We began recruitment of alumni by contacting a Fulbright Association chapter leader. This key informant connected us with a diverse group of four underrepresented Fulbright alumni. These alumni agreed to participate, and they referred us to another four potential interviewees, who subsequently agreed to participate. The specific alumni chapter that we contacted was used as a key informant and selected because of its status as one of the largest and most diverse local chapters.

Alumni Relations Experts

We conducted interviews with alumni relations leaders. Three alumni relations leaders were selected because of the reputation of their university and their institutional engagement with the Fulbright Study Abroad Program. We interviewed Dr. Kevin Fleming, an expert consultant in alumni relations and the author of the post of water conceptual framework, to better understand his unique theory of alumni engagement and to incorporate it into our study of how to improve alumni engagement in the Fulbright Association. We also interviewed two other experts

with professional experience in alumni affairs at nationally recognized higher education institutions including Emory University and Georgetown University.

Association Staff

The Deputy Director of the Fulbright Association connected us with two Fulbright leaders within the Association whom we interviewed as part of our research project. These two leaders were selected due to their job responsibilities which directly relate to developing and supporting U.S. Fulbright alumni.

Data Collection

Both researchers conducted each interview as a team with every alumnus, expert, and Association staff member. The interviews were conducted via ZOOM due to COVID conditions preventing more personal interaction. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes to over an hour, and all interviews were transcribed. First, the eight Fulbright alumni interviews were conducted. After those were completed, we interviewed each of the three expert practitioners in the field of alumni affairs, beginning with Dr. Fleming. Finally, we conducted one-on-one interviews with two Fulbright Association staff. The interviews involving the three data sources allowed us to triangulate the findings from the eight alumni interviews with the data from the three experts and two Association staff. Other ideas for improvement were sought by reviewing the literature on alumni engagement best practices.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Analysis

The analysis of the interview data began with importing exact transcripts of interview data into MAXQDA coding software. Interview transcripts were later reviewed for necessary corrections. Then, answers to each of the questions in the interviews were exported into Microsoft Excel and categorized into one of the five alumni engagement concepts as described in

Fleming's (2019) theory. We employed a priori deductive coding mechanism by first coding according to Fleming's five concepts of alumni engagement, which was how the interview questions were arranged. In addition to coding using Fleming's theoretical concepts, recommendations for improvement were coded and then organized into themes.

The interview transcripts were read and coded multiple times over several weeks to ensure each interview response provided by the interviewees was assigned codes. Some responses were subdivided and assigned multiple codes. Once the interviews had been coded, we began to look for themes in order to respond to the research questions. Once all interview responses had received unique codes, we went back to determine if codes could be merged or consolidated. These codes were generated for all eight alumni we interviewed (Appendix D), all three of the experts we interviewed (Appendix E), and the Fulbright Association staff we interviewed (Appendix F). We continued to review the transcripts after coding to ensure the perspective of each participant was fully realized and to ensure each statement was properly coded. Once coding was complete, we determined the emerging themes to inform our findings.

Research Findings

RQ1: How Do Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni Describe Engagement With the Fulbright Association?

Of the eight underrepresented alumni interviewed, only four reported being involved in the Association. Three of the four alumni reported being involved held leadership positions within the Association. Table 2 summarizes the alumni's engagement descriptions in conjunction with the theoretical framework. The data coding is detailed in Appendices D, E, and F, and the data appearing in Table 2 formed the findings for the first research question. The first three findings emerged as (1) Underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe engagement in terms of

connection; (2) Underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe their engagement as being affirmed as underrepresented; and (3) Underrepresented Fulbright alumni describe engagement as occurring by asserting themselves to gain leadership positions and experiencing community through affinity groups.

Table 2

Alumni Interviewees' Engagement in the Fulbright Association

Interviewee	Involvement				Engagement Categories			
	Local chapter	Association events	Affinity group	Connection and support	Fulfilling experience	Welcomed and affirmed	Committed to Fulbright's future	Sense of belonging
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Somewhat
2	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	N/A
3	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe	Yes	Somewhat
5	No	No	No	Yes	No	Maybe	Yes	Somewhat
6	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe	Yes	Somewhat
7	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes

Finding 1: Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni Describe Engagement in Terms of Connection

Out of the eight interviews, seven subjects indicated that they had not received sufficient communication directed toward them by the Association and, in some cases, the local chapters.

Interviewee 2 first became aware of the alumni chapters during the orientation conference for the Fulbright Study Abroad Program. After doing “some investigation” and locating the local chapter’s representative, Interviewee 2 said:

I emailed them in anticipation like “Hey, I’m going to be an alum whenever I come back, and I would love to connect...” I believe they have my contact information, but there hasn’t been any communication since that time.

Interviewee 6 did not “really feel like there’s a sense of community,” because upon return “to the States,” Interviewee 6 received “a letter of eligibility indicating you had finished your 9 months, or your year abroad, and now you’re back. You can put Fulbright on your resume, basically.” Interviewee 1 confirmed the lack of connection after returning from the Fulbright assignment by indicating “I honestly don’t remember getting anything from the Association.” These experiences were reflected throughout the interviews. The alumni participants indicated a perception that the organization lacked a commitment to connecting with underrepresented alumni. Interviewee 3 also noted not having “a clue about the program to begin with” as well as lacking “a connection with anyone who participated in the Association. When we think about all the things that Black folks encounter daily in the United States, you have to kind of prioritize them.”

Three of the eight interviewees described HBCUs as critical for increasing the representation of Black students in the Fulbright program and as necessary for connecting with alumni. Interviewee 1, an HBCU graduate, reflected that she “didn’t remember getting anything from the Association.” She added, “What I can say about Black folks and our HBCU communities...we operate like families, and so you have to build relationships.”

Fulbright alumni described engagement by the Fulbright Association as receiving some support. Interviewee 6 noted, “I will say that I felt affirmed when Fulbright Noir [a Black affinity group] received some funding to be able to have the conference in Belgium back in 2019.”

Interviewee 3 reported the following:

“I have been asked, “Have you seen any negative connotations or somebody reacting differently because you wear the hijab?” And I was like, “I just feel so welcomed.” We are such a global international community of understanding each other. I never felt different. I have never felt anything less than comradery from Fulbright and the Fulbright community itself.

Furthermore, these two interviewees described institutional values such as “being global” and serving other communities; both interviewees indicated that these were values currently observed by the Association. It is also important to add that both Interviewees 3 and 6 reflected only positively on their Fulbright experiences throughout the course of the interviews.

Finding 2: Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni Describe Their Engagement as Being Affirmed as Underrepresented

Five of the eight alumni described the barriers they faced as they entered their Fulbright assignments and the barriers they continued to face as they returned to the United States from their study abroad assignments. Throughout the interviews, they told stories of how they were aware of the lack of representation and the challenges associated when they entered Fulbright. Interviewee 6 wanted “the Fulbright Association to know about my experiences because I don't want them to happen to anybody else.” Interviewee 6 added:

There was a wall in [the Fulbright advisor's] office with every picture of every person that's ever received a Fulbright from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since she's been the advisor on that campus, which was, I think she'd been advising for maybe like 10, 15

years, something like that, a really long time. And I saw no one that looked like me, and so I was like, "Is this really something that I should do? Should I pursue this?" because it doesn't look like anyone that is remotely close to my skin tone is on this wall.

Interviewee 2 added:

So one of the struggles that I had whenever I was applying was not knowing anyone in my family, in my friends group, in my kind of organizational bubble, who had ever completed a Fulbright. I think that's a limitation of being in an underrepresented group is that we just don't have those people who have accomplished something within our circles like this or not necessarily knowing a person who knows the person who knows the person. So that was definitely like a limiting factor for me as a minority.

As Fulbright alumni, the interviewees described the importance of the Association recognizing these barriers, affirming them as underrepresented alumni, and offering programming to better support them in consideration of these challenges. Interviewee 1 explained the opportunity to provide additional support from a personal level:

Finding a job and all the financial pieces, all of that really contributes to us not really being able to participate with the Association. When I talk about cost, I know it's discounted for students, but I've struggled with housing insecurity multiple times, multiple years. So that \$10 discount is great, or \$25 I think, is great. But when I'm trying to make sure I have a shelter over my head, that \$25 could make that difference, or it could be money to put food in my belly. For me, hitting on those points of Black folks, jobs, student loan debt, no savings, you know, so for us going abroad, uh, and taking that, you're often, yes, we're getting paid, but \$500 when I had, you know, other bills and things, was a big sacrifice, um, and it worked out for me, but when I came back, I lived

off of credit cards. Like my folks had paid off my credit card debt while I was there, came back, and-and had to run it up again. Right. And so, I also struggled finding a job. You would think that having Fulbright on my resume, I would have more opportunities to get jobs. And so I think one of the bigger things is making sure when we're looking at Black folks understanding the cultural differences, but also understanding that we have to work. We have to have some kind of way to get a job. Fulbright is great, but the amount of people I meet on the street when I say I was a Fulbrighter if they're not Black or a person of color, it's like, "You, you are a Fulbrighter?" And so if I'm sitting in a room to get a job that may be the same thing, that the person who's interviewing me may be like, you know, "No, not you, let me go look you up and go check."

Interviewee 4 described the importance of being affirmed by the Association adding, "I will say that I felt affirmed when Fulbright Noir received some funding to be able to have that conference that we had in Belgium, back in 2019. That's when I realized, okay, there's a little bit of support." An example of a missed opportunity by the Association to publicly engage and affirm its underrepresented alumni occurred in 2020 during the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd by police in Minnesota. Interviewee 8 explained as follows:

Last summer when the Black Lives Matter Movement was happening and all these organizations made public statements, our chapter was actually formulating a statement and just talking amongst each other about what if anything we should be doing in that current moment. We were going to put out a statement but we just wanted to run it by the larger umbrella organization, since technically, we're a chapter and we just didn't want to get our lines crossed or anything. We approached them and initially their stance was 'We are supposed to remain bipartisan and neutral.' They were conspicuously silent.

Eventually, they did make a statement but it was weeks and weeks later, I don't know what happened internally. That stance of we are bipartisan, I get it, but at the same time, there's a difference...I don't think it's partisan.

Finding 3: Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni Describe Engagement as Occurring by Asserting Themselves to Gain Leadership Positions and Experiencing Community Through Affinity Groups

Four of the eight interviewees described feeling a sense of community among Fulbright alumni, and three of these four participants reported being involved in affinity groups. All four were also involved in leadership in some capacity within their local chapters or in the Association, such as the diversity task force. Of the four who described feeling a lack of community, they each explained in terms of alumni having to initiate follow up. Interviewee 2 described this point:

Whenever I had attended my orientation conference at John Hopkins prior to my departure, so this would have been like summer 2019, I learned that there's the existence of these alumni chapters. So I did some investigation and found the website and then I found the representative here in Nebraska and I had emailed them in anticipation, "I'm going to be an alumni whenever I come back and I would love to connect," and they kind of took my information, but because, from their explanation back in the summer of 2019, the Nebraska chapter or the Omaha chapter was relatively small, there wasn't a lot going on, so it's kind of been established, and I believe they have my contact information, but there hasn't been any communication since prior to my departure.

Interviewee 6 added to this sentiment:

I don't really feel like there's a sense of community. I say that because once I got back to the States, that was kind of it. They sent me, um, and a lot of other people that I know

who were in the program, it's kinda like you got sent your letter of eligibility that you finished your nine months or your year abroad and now you're back. And so, you can put Fulbright on your resume, basically. We don't feel a sense of community unless you follow up and try to get a position within Fulbright or a position within, like international relations or something like that. Or if you decide to join a local chapter in your state or something like that. But if you don't, it's kinda just like, you're done and it's just a memory or something that you have.

Other alumni described not having the opportunity to engage with other alumni regularly.

Interviewee 5 illustrates this:

Not really. I think there's one thing to go to these one off events, but you know. There's another thing to really be in that community having more regular engagement because when we go to these bigger events there is a lot of production, so you're not really having a long conversation, you're not really talking.

In contrast, alumni who described feeling a strong sense of community were all in leadership positions. Interviewees 1, 3, 7, and 8 indicated having higher levels of engagement or a stronger sense of community, and they each held leadership positions or had been asked to take on leadership roles. Interviewee 1 explains this further:

I do feel a sense of community. I somehow ended up on the Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce for the Association and so I've been to several meetings where I-I met with-- and so helping in those efforts, as well as trying to get the Affinity Group. So the diversity co-collective as we refer to ourselves, um, active in, um, with the Association.

Interviewee 7, also involved in a leadership capacity, describes a strong sense of community:

Yes, if you're asking about just the broad association, I think there's strong, continued support in the Association. I think the annual reports come out every year, and we're able to kind of see the programming from a high level, enterprise-level. The programming that exists that I've seen in there has been all positive, all very economically advantageous in terms of fundraising, and just socially conscious as well in terms of some of the individual projects and initiatives that various chapters have decided to undertake. I would say they definitely were weathering COVID, doing well prior, and I think it was a little bit of a dip, but I think we're starting to see now people are starting to come back. People want programming now. I had a few people even reach out to me about restarting talks about developing the chapter.

Interviewee 3, who serves in a board-level position, also described feeling a strong sense of community.

Definitely. I mean, so for me, like, uh, as I said, like from-- when I came to the US back in 2007, uh, the mission of Fulbright was to communicate and share with the people of the United States. And so, I would take every opportunity that the Fulbright association would offer to international students. So, my association with Fulbright dates back to 2007. So, it's been my one major source of social capital developing that social capital and that communicating with people, um, Fulbright has always played a big part in that.

Interviewee 8 describes having found community through looking for leadership opportunities:

Eventually, I went to prospective board members' meetings, and then just talked to people and then decided to run for the board, and then I ended up joining the board there. I actually find it a really welcoming community. I mean, there's the larger chapter, the National Capital Area Chapter. Then, there's our board. We have monthly meetings. We

get together once a month just to have our various planning meetings; we put together events. I mean, we've all become colleagues and friends in addition to just doing this activity together.

Participation in affinity groups was reported to motivate engagement and create a greater sense of community. Interviewee 4 described feeling a sense of community with one such affinity group:

I didn't feel a sense of community with my local chapter. I actually wasn't sure that we had a local chapter. But I can say I did feel a strong sense of community with the black Fulbrighters of Europe (Fulbright Noir) because they started their inaugural group that year that I was a Fulbrighter. And we had our first-ever conference together, and we still have a group chat. So I do feel community there because it was created by, I believe, it was three or four Black women who created that group.

Interviewee 6 adds how she felt community through involvement in Fulbright Noir and that it is encouraging knowing that there's other people that are culturally similar to you" that "can agree with you on some things about your experience. Interviewee 8 added to these sentiments but also said that it would be helpful if there were "some kind of formal recognition of these affinity groups."

RQ2: What Can the Association Do to Increase Alumni Engagement Among Underrepresented Alumni?

The alumni offered 17 specific opportunities to improve their engagement with either the Association or local chapters; however, nearly all of their suggestions require routine and systematic methods of collecting and analyzing alumni data. Ultimately, four major categories for increasing alumni engagement among underrepresented alumni emerged from the data analysis. Each of those categories became a finding, and Table 3 depicts how the findings

developed during data analysis. The following four findings are (4) Collect more alumni data to inform outreach and programming, (5) Strengthen and support affinity groups, (6) Create opportunities for mentoring, (7) Increase representation through outreach.

Finding 4: Collect More Alumni Data to Inform Outreach and Programming

Five of eight alumni interviewees revealed that the Association had not made contact with them or had only sent an email to them upon their return to the United States, adding to a perception that the Association was either uninterested in engaging them or did not know who they were. Interviewee 4 suggested that Fulbright alumni do want to provide data to the Association. The Association staff interviewees revealed that comprehensive census data was not solicited from alumni. One of the Association staff members reported that a primary data source involved receiving anecdotes from chapter leaders, which only included stories about engaged alumni and excluded the alumni not attending chapter meetings or Association conferences and seminars.

Interviewee 2 explained how important data collection is to inform outreach to new Fulbright alumni:

To be a part of the alumni association and [develop] connections with the organization itself, they should have access to very basic information about the individuals who just completed the term. I would have loved to have seen or received an email indicating they got my information. Just taking the time to write a personal message stating, “Hey, we saw that you recently completed your Fulbright and wanted to congratulate you on this phenomenal feat. I'd like to get together, have a conversation about what you did, and also take the time to introduce you to some future steps that you could pursue if you wanted.”

Table 3*Categories Formed From Suggestions by Eight Alumni About Improving Engagement*

Category	Suggestion	n	%
Collect more alumni data to inform outreach and programming	Form a database of alumni that prospective students can use for contacting similar research interest	1	12.5
	Use alumni data to more systematically connect alumni	5	62.5
	Connect and orient alumni to association sooner	4	50.0
	Provide a more thorough orientation to the Association to collect data for engaging alumni in local chapters	6	75.0
Strengthen and support affinity groups	Add Association support for existing affinity groups	6	75.0
	Develop identity-based affinity groups	2	25.0
	Leverage participants of affinity groups to inform programming	2	25.0
	Provide programs for networking and career advancement	3	37.5
	Use more social media	2	25.0
Create opportunities for mentoring	Mentor and guide prospective Fulbright scholars	5	62.5
	Ask Alumni to assist in recruitment activities as mentors	4	50.0
Increase representation through outreach	Provide more support for HBCU alumni and contact on campuses	3	37.5
	Highlight diverse alumni's stories	1	12.5
	Recognize underrepresented students for the work they are achieving in their fields	1	12.5
	Enhance transparency of election process	1	12.5
	Generate more outreach to advisors on campuses	2	25.0

Connect local chapters to international clubs (i.e., Fulbright Korea) to encourage local participation more quickly	1	12.5
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Interviewee 7 described an opportunity exists to support underrepresented prospective Fulbright scholars by collecting data:

It would be a big undertaking possibly to aggregate the interest. Maybe you could do it on a Google form and just have people fill out like where you did your Fulbright year? What's your area of focus? Maybe something like that. I think having it would be immensely beneficial because basically, you're sitting down, and you're absorbing information from someone who's already done it. That's really the best form to learn from someone more seasoned.

Interview 2 stated that establishing a database for alumni-specific research interests could be accessible to prospective students along with their contact information. This database would allow alumni to mentor prospective scholars and provide guidance when needed.

Finding 5: Strengthen and Support Affinity Groups

Four (50%) alumni interviewed mentioned that they had attended at least one Association-related event. Three of the alumni indicated they were members of an affinity group but had not joined a local chapter nor had attended any events facilitated by the Association. Seven of the eight alumni made statements supporting affinity groups and agreed they are essential for increasing engagement among underrepresented alumni. Two agreed they are helpful in establishing stronger connections among alumni, but others argued they are important for career assistance and advancement. Two interviewees indicated that successful affinity groups required Association leadership support and that they should serve as gateways to the larger organization.

The alumni also indicated an opportunity exists to work with the affinity groups that already exist, such as Fulbright Noir, and that Association leadership could incorporate these

affinity groups into the larger organization by properly embracing these existing groups. There is strong support for affinity groups as a strategic pathway for engagement with the broader association or local chapters. Interviewee 4 explained that “it would be great to see affinity groups, kind of like if you went to this place, or you have this identity, we have a group for you.” She added:

Of course, jobs, who doesn't want to be connected for networking, and recognizing, or job shadowing or career connections. I think job shadowing would actually be a very big one, because a lot of Fulbrighters I think are very interested in a lot of things. It'd be great to be able to shadow someone who has a different career and just to explore a little bit. I would say the top three things would be connecting with people of uh, with an identity so much like yours, career connections, and then also just social events.

Interviewee 3 explained how affinity groups could be used to further the mission of Fulbright:

I think these affinity groups definitely would serve the purpose of Fulbright if they would be more open to other people, so any member who is affiliated with Fulbright could be part of them. So, I think that is one way they can definitely play their role, and ... the alumni chapter has its own structure, but if you have an affinity group who's also promoting the Fulbright mission, why not? Because you will always have a new set of ideas, a new group of people. It's like the more the merrier?

Interviewee 1 explained that one way the Association could support the groups is by “having a space on the website so that people know that we exist.” Interviewee 5 thought “the Fulbright community has been a multicultural community by design, and I think there's value in not isolating certain groups,” so affinity groups could enhance community and engagement.

Interviewee 7 liked “having those affinity groups” as beneficial, “especially the topical ones or the institutional ones like World Bank, IMF, UN.” Interviewee 7 noted “that in terms of attracting URMs specifically, maybe if there was something that was centered around some type of networking, get together or something like that” and concluded the following:

I think those events tend to draw more people out, and then, if you want to drill down underrepresented minorities, who are recently returned grantees like myself, the other ones that I know who identify as I do usually like to go to those types of events.

Interviewee 5 preferred that the Association have “a way to connect with, maybe, the younger alumni through social media as a way of just keeping us engaged, because I feel like there's that disconnect between the Association and the actual organization.” Interviewee 8 did not want the contact to be “overly programmatic,” but added “even just having some that are geared for the younger population, happy hours like bars, free food is always going. Young professionals networking. ‘You have recently returned from Asia, so now what?’ ... Just maybe keeping that in mind.” Interviewee 8 believed “there’s a lot of, I guess, symbiotic, programmatic things that can come out of” affinity groups as something that “advances the Fulbright mission and just increases the people’s willingness to get involved with even, say, their local chapter.” The majority of the alumni interviewed expressed that programs like these would generate interest for younger Fulbright alumni, particularly as both the alumni and Fulbright leadership seemed to agree that programming seemed geared towards older alumni.

Finding 6: Create Opportunities for Mentoring

The five alumni who indicated less involvement in the Association or local chapters discussed wanting to learn about programs the Association might offer to recruit, mentor, and provide guidance to prospective Fulbright scholars. Alumni recalled needing additional support

as no mentoring, and little guidance existed and therefore recommended a short-term mentoring program that provided resources for guidance and support by pairing new Fulbright students or recent alumni with alumni volunteers. All eight alumni reported support for a mentoring program and reported a willingness to pilot such a program. Mentoring was discussed as a means to engage more alumni, to invest in the future of Fulbright for students of color, to facilitate networking and career opportunities, and to help navigate the process of applying or making it through their assignment with the necessary support, as illustrated by Interviewee 2:

Once I got back, I was on the ground like, “All right, what can I do back in little Nebraska? What are we going to do to, you know, to better the lives of those who are going to be filling out Fulbright applications?”

Regarding mentoring programs for support, Interview 1 explained:

Create a mentorship program that really gives us that support because it's not just “let me give you this information.” Right? Because I ignore emails a lot, but it's like, “I need to be connected with someone who can nurture and really walk me through.” Because a lot of us, we can win a Fulbright and still have no clue what that means. So I think building that relationship, reaching out as early as possible, and continuing that while they're abroad and when they come back would be helpful.

Interviewee 5 was a first-generation college student who noted how mentoring could have helped him “better orient” because he wanted to help “younger underrepresented minority Fulbrighters to help guide them through” and how this type of mentoring is important for underrepresented prospective Fulbright scholars like himself. Interview 6 described mentoring in terms of being generally available for questions to current and prospective Fulbright scholars:

Just being able to allow them to be like, "Yes, you have my email and my phone number let students call me or email me with their questions. I'd be happy to do it." So, I do agree, and I would do it for free just because, you know, it's something I'm passionate about. I know a lot of my Fulbright colleagues would also do it for free because it's not about money. It's about being able to relay the information and to make their experiences more enjoyable.

Four alumni expressed an interest in developing programs to assist other recent alumni as they enter back into the workforce. Seven of the eight interviewees reiterated the importance of career support and mentoring as a means to engage alumni. Interviewee 1 remarked:

One of the things I do notice and in conversations with people is that it's not really geared towards younger grantees, more specifically the recent graduates. You know, I'm in my 30s, and so I feel like we're also missed in that, as well. I think there needs to be a lot of work there.

Finding 7: Increase Representation Through Outreach

The interviewees all indicated a need for greater Association outreach in two specific areas that the Association could address to improve underrepresentation perceptions. The first was the relationship between the Association and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). Three of the eight interviewees described HBCUs as critical for increasing the representation of Black students in the Fulbright program and as essential for enhancing alumni involvement. Interviewee 5 expressed frustration about outreach as follows:

I can't advocate for Fulbright to go to HBCUs when their alumni have become disconnected with the Program. You know, I feel you have to pay your dues as well, and

so I think providing opportunities for us to do that more readily and more easily would definitely help more people stay engaged.

Seven alumni indicated that they hope to see more inclusion and diversity advocacy as outreach by the Association and the local chapters. Interviewee 5 explained that underrepresented groups, especially in “academia and or higher education,” often represent the first-generation in higher education in their families. Consequently, Interviewee 5 noted the importance of reaching out as a benefit to Fulbright and its alumni:

I think we all want to help the next generation, so that common idea of helping others like me, or even what is it to pass our accomplishments as something that we love and I think that's definitely a characteristic that I imagine you guys are seeing from conversing with a lot of people. That similar interest is proof enough that the answer to that question would be an overarching “yes.” And, or like hell yes, like it depends on the person, of course, but I'm pretty sure there, they tend to skew positive whenever it comes to opportunities of giving back and helping other people accomplish what we did.

Recommendations

Based on the literature and our empirical analysis of the data provided by the eight alumni, three alumni experts, and two Association staff, we offer three major recommendations. The alumni expert interviews represented an opportunity for triangulation with the findings from the eight underrepresented alumni’s interviews. The alumni experts’ data are presented here as they support the three major recommendations that emerged. The Fulbright Association can benefit from improved alumni engagement through the implementation of any of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The Fulbright Association Should Provide Greater Support and Resources to Affinity Groups for Underrepresented Fulbright Alumni

As Findings 3 and 5 indicated, affinity groups are strongly supported as a method for engaging alumni by current Fulbright alumni as well as alumni relations experts. Affinity groups have the potential to create opportunities for underrepresented Fulbright alumni to experience a greater level of comfort with the Fulbright Association (Alumni Expert 3). Participation in affinity groups could place many such alumni on the pathway to greater opportunities for engagement and leadership in their local chapters and the Fulbright Association (Alumni Expert 2).

By providing access to resources and support to affinity groups, the Fulbright Association can enable underrepresented Fulbright alumni to serve more effectively as ambassadors and advocates for both the Fulbright Study Abroad Program and the alumni association (Alumni Expert 1). Resources should include some level of funding from the Fulbright Association to affiliated affinity groups as such organizations often find it challenging to raise the funds necessary to promote and host meaningful activities for alumni members (Alumni Expert 3). As Alumni Expert 1 explained, “I’ve started affinity groups by race, by profession, by gender...they are the way alumni relations is going, particularly if you have a large population...geographically spread out.”

Affinity groups have proven to be particularly successful with underrepresented alumni communities (Alumni Expert 3). As Alumni Expert 2 explained, “Where I think [they] make the most sense is if you've especially had challenges with certain communities historically as an institution...chances are your under-represented minorities have felt somewhat as outsiders or others at your institution...finding ways to engage with members of those communities (is) good signaling that the institution is invested and cares about these communities.”

Empowering such affinity groups and their underrepresented Fulbright alumni members could increase the visibility of their Fulbright experience to underrepresented communities (Alumni Expert 3). A greater awareness in such communities is necessary to expand the application rate among underrepresented student populations (Gallo, 2012). Increasing underrepresented student participation in the Fulbright Study Abroad Program might assist the Fulbright Association in its mission-related effort to attract greater alumni diversity within its organization (Fulbright Association, 2020).

Recommendation 2: The Fulbright Association Should Incorporate Ongoing Career-Oriented Guidance and Mentoring Offerings Into Its Alumni Programming

As Findings 1 and 6 suggested, providing and receiving career-oriented guidance and mentoring represents an important avenue for connecting with and engaging alumni. The eight interviewees discussed valuing career-oriented and mentoring programs as a vital source of connection. Underrepresented alumni and young alumni particularly value such programs, two audiences that the Fulbright Association seeks to better engage (Alumni Expert 3; Fulbright Association Staff 1, 2021). These program offerings are also a recognized best practice in alumni organizations, based on the literature review and our research findings. As Alumni Expert 2 said, “The most meaningful levels of engagement, the highest reporting of satisfaction [result] from career services, career fairs, or mentoring.”

The eight underrepresented Fulbright alumni expressed overwhelming interest in participating in career-oriented and mentoring opportunities. Moreover, such mentoring programs could even provide current underrepresented Fulbright students with helpful guidance and insight from an alumni member of their community prior to embarking on their Fulbright experience. Based on the literature and our interviews, a mentoring program would help address a significant need for supporting the underrepresented students preparing to study abroad.

Furthermore, as our alumni experts shared, career-oriented and mentoring opportunities are among the best methods of connecting current students and alumni (Alumni Expert 1). The incorporation of such programming by the Fulbright Association could create more significant opportunities for underrepresented alumni to promote the Fulbright Study Abroad Program to potential applicants as a form of outreach that comprehensively benefits the Association (Alumni Expert 3). Mentoring can represent a meaningful way to connect underrepresented Fulbright alumni with similar student populations and could lead to increased participation in both the Fulbright Study Abroad Program and the Fulbright Association in the future (Alumni Expert 2).

Recommendation 3: The Fulbright Association Should Expand Data Gathering and Analysis Capacity to Improve Strategic Planning, Organizational Effectiveness, and Alumni Outreach and Engagement

This recommendation emerged because of Findings 2, 4, and 7. The alumni suggested that if the Association collected better data on them, the Association could meet their needs and entice more engagement from them with the Association. Through engagement, they could gain affirmation and participate in recruiting underrepresented students to the Fulbright Association. Gathering more data allows alumni organizations to understand their members better, and the resulting information allows alumni organizations to engage with specific alumni groups and members more effectively. Alumni Expert 1 discussed the need for and value of data:

Data is so rich and fills in a lot of contours and context behind any hard numbers that you can find. As professionals, we have good intuition. We are attuned to what our alumni want and our sense of what we need to do ... Oftentimes data will back up what you're saying and help you tweak your understanding, but oftentimes, you know what needs to be done. Then, there are lots of times where the data will really surprise you and shift your worldview of how well you understood things.

Clearly, expanded data capacity represents an essential element of effective alumni relations (Alumni Expert 2).

However, the underrepresented Fulbright alumni suggested there are challenges associated with their participation. Comprehensive data collection is necessary to better identify underrepresented alumni's needs and interests and improve the quality of the communication shared with them (Alumni Expert 3). Alumni Expert 2 explained, "You need data. You need to know who your alumni are.... You can't determine how well you're engaging underrepresented minorities if you don't know who they are." Equally important is the care with which the information is solicited from underrepresented alumni members (Alumni Expert 3). Alumni Expert 3 recommended being thoughtful about:

Collecting that demographic information, explaining why it's important, explaining what you're going to do with that data, and making sure people know that this is not to exclude you from anything [but] to be able to better serve you and understand you.

Additionally, such data provide opportunities for greater strategic planning on the part of the Fulbright Association (Alumni Expert 1). Improved strategic planning based on collected data can assist the Fulbright Association in addressing a variety of challenges associated with both Fulbright alumni and underrepresented Fulbright alumni members (Alumni Expert 2). Improved data gathering can yield improved strategic planning to create significant opportunities for greater organizational effectiveness, innovation, and growth.

This expanded capacity would allow the Fulbright Association to connect on a deeper and more personal level with its underrepresented alumni (Alumni Expert 3). It would provide the opportunity to improve outreach to such alumni by improving communication with them and more effectively tracking engagement activity (Alumni Expert 2). Increasing the size and scope

of their data, and embracing data-driven decision making, could provide the Fulbright Association with the ability to address the current lack of diversity within their alumni association and to better prepare for future challenges, as well (Alumni Expert 1).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our capstone project aimed to answer the following problem of practice: How can the Fulbright Association increase engagement within their alumni organization, and particularly among underrepresented Fulbright alumni? Two research questions were developed to enable the Fulbright Association to better understand the experiences of underrepresented Fulbright alumni and to provide guidance to bolster the outreach and engagement approaches directed towards these alumni.

The findings revealed that underrepresented Fulbright alumni described their perceptions about institutional integrity as impacting their participation in the Fulbright Association. This institutional integrity was described as the degree to which Fulbright understands, supports, and affirms their underrepresented alumni. Additionally, the findings indicated that underrepresented Fulbright alumni perceived a lack of opportunities for engagement and programming within the alumni association, even though they expressed feeling connected to the Association.

To complete our capstone research, we relied on qualitative data to examine outreach to and engagement with underrepresented Fulbright alumni. Our data supported existing literature on alumni engagement practices within higher education institutions. We provided recommendations for further research on the impact of outreach and engagement practices for underrepresented alumni. Our study design and methodology could be replicated with increased sample sizes and participation and add to the existing literature on underrepresented alumni engagement for the benefit of alumni organizations such as the Fulbright Association.

Limitations

The primary limitations associated with our capstone findings were specific to the study's research design, methodology, and implementation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, significant logistical challenges affected our ability to secure interview participants. There were several nonrespondents from the original pool of potential interviewees, suggesting the findings could be limited by the smaller sample size of eight interviewees. As we relied on Fulbright Association leaders, who represented key informants, to secure participants for interviews, the sample of Fulbright alumni might have represented atypical engagement levels. Consequently, the participants might represent a biased sample, reducing the generalization of research findings. Furthermore, because qualitative methodology is primarily a perspective-based approach for generating in-depth findings, our research findings are not statistically representative of the general population of all alumni of the Fulbright study abroad program. A larger, more diverse sample of underrepresented alumni could help ensure that the resulting data have breadth and are representative of the Association's alumni population.

Delimitations

In terms of delimitations, the target populations for the Association's improvement project were underrepresented Fulbright alumni, experts in the field of alumni affairs, and Fulbright Association staff. The use of three data sources allowed us to triangulate the findings between the participants who were eight Fulbright alumni, three alumni experts, and two Association staff. Within the scope of our capstone, we also included the literature on alumni engagement best practices. We recognize that the scope of the capstone was narrow, meaning that future studies with larger or more diverse pools of interview participants could generate different research findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of our capstone project was to examine the alumni engagement and outreach practices of the Fulbright Association, particularly among underrepresented Fulbright alumni, and to explore possible best practices to increase alumni participation. Our findings provide the Fulbright Association with alumni engagement approaches and best practices supported by underrepresented Fulbright alumni and alumni relations experts. The resulting tactics from our research findings may allow the Fulbright Association to improve overall alumni participation within the organization with the potential of significantly improving outreach and engagement among underrepresented Fulbright alumni.

Equally important, our capstone findings emphasize the importance of better understanding the opinions, motivations, and behaviors of Fulbright alumni. The ongoing collection of alumni data and information, as well as direct engagement with underrepresented Fulbright alumni, may be critical to making improvements. As the research findings indicate, efforts to collect data and increase mentoring, among other recommendations, may help the Fulbright Association engage its alumni better and increase participation in the Association's activities and events.

Additionally, this capstone's findings provide insight to all alumni organizations seeking to understand and engage their underrepresented alumni. The recommended approaches to alumni engagement and outreach are particularly appropriate for education-related alumni organizations. Still, they can also benefit any alumni association seeking to improve underrepresented alumni outreach efforts and to strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusion within their organizations. While additional research is needed, our capstone findings augment

existing literature in the field and provide valuable guidance to alumni organizations pursuing greater engagement of underrepresented alumni members.

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Appendix A

Fulbright Alumni Interview Email, Protocol and Questions

EMAIL Invitation to Participate

Dear [Name]:

We hope this email finds you well. We are grateful to the leadership of the Fulbright Association for helping us connect with you. As they may have mentioned, our study seeks to understand how the Fulbright Association can improve their outreach to and engagement with Fulbright alumni. Specifically, our research will focus on how outreach and engagement can be improved among underrepresented alumni members.

Given your knowledge of the Fulbright Association, we are contacting you to set up an interview and learn more about your experiences. We anticipate that the interview will take about 60 minutes and can be conducted by phone. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Vanderbilt University and your participation will be kept completely anonymous.

We understand how busy your schedule is and we are grateful for your willingness to share your insight with us. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact us via email at Matthew.Meeks@vanderbilt.edu or James.Parenti@vanderbilt.edu or by phone at (202) 549-5227.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meeks
Jim Parenti
Vanderbilt University

PROTOCOL

Participants: URM Fulbright Association Alumni

JIM

Good Afternoon (Name). I want you to know how grateful Matt and I are to speak with you. We know how busy your schedule is so we particularly appreciate your taking time to participate in our research study. As you know, Matt and I are doctoral students at Vanderbilt and this research study is the final component of our three-year program - the Capstone. **Matt and I have been working closely with the leadership and staff of the Fulbright Association over the last year to conduct research on the existing perceptions of the outreach and engagement of the Association with you and your fellow association members. They are specifically interested in learning what works, what doesn't, and how current efforts can be improved. They wish to increase outreach and engagement among underrepresented Fulbright alumni so they are particularly interested in the thoughts and suggestions from alumni leaders like you.** When I'm not working on this Capstone, I work at Georgetown University. I have also worked at Columbia University in New York. At both institutions, I worked closely with international students and international student organizations. I have also been fortunate to work directly on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Columbia University with former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, and the University Diversity Committee - and here at Georgetown with our Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action. And now, I will hand it off to Matt to introduce himself.

MATT

Good Afternoon, my name is Matthew Meeks and Jim Parenti and I are so glad to be here with you today.. For the next 60 minutes, we are going to ask you some questions to better understand how we can enhance alumni engagement within the Fulbright Association. You were selected because of your expertise and knowledge of Fulbright and alumni engagement and we believe you are best suited to help us better understand engagement within Fulbright and to address and discover how to enhance participation and community. So we are excited to learn from you today.

We recognize the opportunity before us to pursue your feedback and conduct this study to promote community within the Association and implement your recommendations to promote a more inclusive environment within the Association.

I myself have studied abroad in at least six countries, but I have participated in outreach, travel, and study projects in over 30 countries. I have worked with international students in higher education for over fifteen years. I am passionate about Latin American studies and I spent time working with the Achi indigenous people in Guatemala.

So that's a little about me, Jim ?

JIM

Thanks Matt. We want to remind you (NAME) that we will be recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often share very helpful thoughts in these discussions and we simply can't write fast enough to get them all down. Also, we will be on a first name basis today, but we won't use your name in our reports - so you may be assured of complete confidentiality.

It's important to note (NAME) that there are no wrong answers. So please feel free to share your point of view. And keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments.

Our final study will be shared with the Fulbright Association staff to help them plan future programs and to hopefully improve their outreach and engagement with you and your colleagues in the Association.

With that, let's begin.

QUESTIONS

JIM

1. It would be great if you could start by telling us about what experiences led you to apply to Fulbright - and what you hoped to receive from the experience?

PROBE: How would you characterize your experience in Fulbright?

MATT

Sense of Fulfillment

2. Do you feel a sense of community within the Fulbright Association? (why or why not?)

Would you characterize your experience in the Fulbright association as fulfilling? Why or why not?

PROBE: Has the Association facilitated meaningful connections for you both personally or professionally? If yes, how so?

JIM

Personal Values

3. When thinking about your own personal values, can you describe whether you connect any of these values in particular within the Association?

PROBE: How would you say your values are reflected in the work and initiatives of the Association?

MATT

Perceived Institutional Integrity

4. How would you describe the Fulbright Association to someone else?

How would you describe the climate and culture within the Association? Do you feel welcomed and what could the organization do to affirm your race, identity, and/or culture?

PROBE: As you know, there's concern that there isn't much participation by Under Represented Minority Members in the Fulbright Association, why do you think that's the case?

Do you have any suggestions to increase participation?

JIM

Sense of Connection

5. How has Fulbright affirmed your identity and sense of belonging as a URM?

PROBE: In what areas can the organization improve to make you feel affirmed and part of the organization?

MATT

Commitment

6. How would you describe your commitment to the Fulbright Association?

PROBE: How would you describe your investment in their success as an organization? Do you perceive other opportunities within Fulbright to which you would like to support or contribute to?

JIM**Recommendations**

7. As we mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, we have had the opportunity to hear from other leaders like yourself in the alumni association and they have suggested some ways to improve outreach and engagement with underrepresented members of the Fulbright Association that we would like to ask you about.

But first, we would be interested in hearing what your recommendations are on how the Fulbright Association might improve outreach and engagement with the URM community?

MATT

8. Given the busy life you lead, what factors might encourage you to contribute time or support to the Fulbright Association?

JIM

9. We have heard from key stakeholders about opportunities to participate in affinity organizations of the Fulbright Association. Do you currently participate in any affinity groups? And would the availability of an affinity group impact your decision to participate in alumni activities? (Why or why not?)

MATT

10. We have heard from key stakeholders that a mentoring program might be helpful for Fulbright. Would you consider participating in a mentoring program? (Why or why not?)

MATT

That concludes our questions. Thank you, again, for joining us and for sharing your thoughts and insight with us. This type of feedback is very helpful to our research effort.

JIM

That's right, Matt. And most importantly your participation may help the Fulbright Association to improve their outreach and engagement with alumni - and particularly underrepresented alumni. So - Thank You again.

Appendix B

Alumni Relations Experts Interview Protocol and Questions

Email Invitation to Participate

Dear [Name]:

We hope this email finds you well. We are contacting you regarding our research study with the Fulbright Association. As you know, the Fulbright program provides grants for individual study and research abroad for thousands of undergraduate students each year. The Fulbright Association is the alumni organization for all Fulbright U.S. students. They currently have 54 local Fulbright chapters and more than 60,000 alumni. Like many alumni organizations, however, they have encountered challenges in keeping their alumni actively engaged in the Association. They have asked us to examine how the Association can improve their outreach to and engagement with Fulbright alumni. They are specifically interested in how outreach and engagement can be improved among underrepresented alumni members.

Given your knowledge of higher education and, specifically, alumni outreach and engagement, we are contacting you to set up an interview to learn more about your experience as well as your thoughts and ideas related to our research topic. We anticipate that the interview will take about 60 minutes and can be conducted by phone. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Vanderbilt University and your participation will be kept completely anonymous.

We understand how busy your schedule is and we are grateful for your willingness to share your insight with us. If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact us via email at Matthew.Meeks@vanderbilt.edu or James.Parenti@vanderbilt.edu or by phone at (202) 549-5227.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meeks
Jim Parenti
Vanderbilt University

PROTOCOL

Participants: Alumni Stakeholders and Experts

JIM

Good Afternoon (Name). I want you to know how grateful Matt and I are to speak with you. We know how busy your schedule is so we particularly appreciate your taking time to participate in our research study. As you know, Matt and I are doctoral students at Vanderbilt and this research study is the final component of our three-year program - the Capstone. Matt and I have been working closely with the leadership and staff of the Fulbright Association over the last year to conduct research on their alumni outreach and engagement. They are interested in learning what works, what doesn't, and how current efforts can be improved. They specifically wish to increase outreach and engagement among underrepresented Fulbright alumni so they are particularly interested in the thoughts and suggestions of career alumni professionals like you. When I'm not working on this Capstone, I work at Georgetown University. I have also worked at Columbia University in New York. At both institutions, I worked closely with international students and international student organizations. I have also been fortunate to work directly on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Columbia University with former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, and the SIPA Diversity Committee - and here at Georgetown with our Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action. And now, I will hand it off to Matt to introduce himself.

MATT

Good Afternoon, my name is Matthew Meeks and Jim Parenti and I are so glad to be here with you today. For the next 60 minutes, we are going to ask you some questions to better understand how we can enhance alumni engagement within the Fulbright Association. You were selected because of your expertise and knowledge of alumni engagement and we believe you are best suited to help us better understand engagement within Fulbright and to address and discover how to enhance participation and community. So we are excited to learn from you today.

We recognize the opportunity before us to pursue your feedback and conduct this study to promote community within the Association and implement your recommendations to promote a more inclusive environment within the Association.

Have some experience working with alumni relations when I provided oversight of enrollment management years ago, but, and related to this study, most of my experience is in studying abroad, which I have done in at least six countries, but I have participated in outreach, travel, and study projects in over 30 countries. I have worked with international students in higher education for over fifteen years. I am passionate about Latin American studies and I spent time working with the Achi indigenous people in Guatemala.

So that's a little about me, Jim ?

JIM

Thanks Matt. We want to remind you (NAME) that we will be recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often share very helpful thoughts in these discussions and we simply can't write fast enough to get them all down. Also, we will be on a first name basis today, but we won't use your name in our reports - so you may be assured of complete confidentiality.

It's important to note (NAME) that there are no wrong answers. So please feel free to share your point of view. And keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments.

Our final study will be shared with the Fulbright Association staff to help them plan future programs and to hopefully improve their outreach and engagement with you and your colleagues in the Association.

With that, let's begin.

QUESTIONS

JIM

1. It would be great if you could start by telling us about what experiences led you to work in alumni relations - and a bit about your overall experience?

MATT

Sense of Fulfillment

2. Given the challenges that alumni organizations are facing, what do you think alumni associations can do to create more meaningful experiences for their alumni?

PROBE: How can alumni associations help develop personal and professional connections for alumni members ?

JIM**Personal Values**

3. What consideration should be given to the personal values of alumni members?
How important should the values of alumni be to an organization?

PROBE: How can alumni organizations ensure that member values are reflected in the work and initiatives of the Association?

MATT**Perceived Institutional Integrity**

4. As you know, many organizations today are discussing and examining systemic racism and institutionalized inequities. Given this reality, how do organizations like yours effectively address climate and culture within the Association? How do you make alumni feel welcomed within the organization and what do you do to affirm race, identity, and culture?

PROBE: How important are URM to your organization - and what can be done to address issues related to this community within the Fulbright Association?

JIM**Sense of Connection**

5. Given the hectic and busy lives so many of us are leading these days, how can alumni organizations better engage and impact the lives of their members?

PROBE: Can you describe any meaningful connections you've witnessed through your alumni association ?

MATT**Commitment**

6. How can you increase personal commitment to an alumni association?

PROBE: Can you describe ways in which alumni invest in the overall success of an alumni organization?

JIM

Recommendations

7. As we mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, we have had the opportunity to hear from other leaders like yourself and they have suggested some ways to improve outreach and engagement with underrepresented members of the Fulbright Association that we would like to ask you about.

But first, we would be interested in hearing what your recommendations are on how the Fulbright Association might improve outreach and engagement with the URM community?

MATT

8. What factors typically encourage alumni to contribute more time or support to alumni associations?

JIM

9. We have heard from some stakeholders about opportunities to participate in alumni affinity organizations. Are you familiar with the impact of alumni affinity groups? Can the availability of an affinity group impact alumni members' decisions to participate in alumni activities? (Why or why not?)

MATT

10. We have also heard from key stakeholders that a mentoring program might be helpful for Fulbright. Have you had any experiences with alumni mentoring programs? And could their presence increase alumni engagement? (Why or why not?)

MATT

That concludes our questions. Thank you, again, for joining us and for sharing your thoughts and insight with us. This type of feedback is very helpful to our research effort.

JIM

That's right, Matt. And most importantly your participation may help the Fulbright Association to improve their outreach and engagement with alumni - and particularly underrepresented alumni.
So - Thank You again.

Appendix C

Fulbright Staff Interview Protocol and Questions

Participants: Fulbright Association Leadership

JIM

Good Afternoon (Name). I want you to know how grateful Matt and I are to speak with you. We know how busy your schedule is so we particularly appreciate your taking time to participate in our research study. As you know, Matt and I are doctoral students at Vanderbilt and this research study is the final component of our three-year program - the Capstone. We have been working with the leadership and staff of the Fulbright Association over the last year to conduct research on your alumni outreach and engagement. They have indicated that they are interested in improving alumni outreach and engagement and that they are specifically interested in increasing outreach and engagement among underrepresented alumni. When I'm not working on this Capstone, I work at Georgetown University. I have also worked at Columbia University in New York. At both institutions, I worked closely with international students and international student organizations. I have also been fortunate to work directly on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Columbia University with former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, and the SIPA Diversity Committee - and here at Georgetown with our Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action. And now, I will hand it off to Matt to introduce himself.

MATT

Good Afternoon, Jim and I are so appreciative of your time today. For the next hour, we are going to ask you some questions to better understand how alumni outreach and engagement occurs within the Association. Obviously, your expertise and knowledge of Fulbright and alumni engagement will inform our work moving forward. So we are really excited to learn from you today.

I myself have studied abroad in at least six countries, but I have participated in outreach, travel, and study projects in over 30 countries. I have worked with international students in higher education for over fifteen years. I am passionate about Latin American studies and I spent time working with the Achi indigenous people in Guatemala.

So that's a little about me, Jim ?

JIM

Thanks Matt. We want to remind you (NAME) that we will be recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often share very helpful thoughts in these discussions and we

simply can't write fast enough to get them all down. Also, we will be on a first name basis today, but we won't use your name in our reports - so you may be assured of complete confidentiality.

It's important to note (NAME) that there are no wrong answers. So please feel free to share your point of view.

With that, let's begin.

QUESTIONS

JIM

1. It would be great if you could start by telling us about what experiences led you to work at Fulbright - as well as a bit about your overall experience and background?

MATT

2. Can you share with us a bit of information on your alumni or membership office? It's size, the number of staff, and your approximate budget?

PROBE: Are there organizational constraints that prohibit your outreach and engagement?

JIM

3. How many Fulbright Association Alumni are there? And how many active alumni do you have?

PROBE: How do you identify "active" alumni?

MATT

4. How would you describe or characterize your alumni?

PROBE: Can you describe any generational, regional, or cultural differences among your alumni?

JIM

5. How would you describe the Association's climate for URM alumni?

PROBE: What challenges are unique to this community within the Association?

MATT

6. How does the Association approach Fulbright alumni about joining the organization?

PROBE: Do you conduct any association outreach or engagement with current Fulbright students while they're abroad ?

JIM

7. What kind of events do you hold for alumni?

PROBE: Are there alumni events and activities that are particularly of interest to or targeted toward your URM members?

MATT

8. How do you communicate with your alumni ?

PROBE: What communication approaches have proven to be particularly effective ? How do you communicate with URM members ?

JIM

9. Do you do any fundraising among your alumni? How does that work?

PROBE: If yes, what is the level of participation among URM alumni in your fundraising efforts?

MATT

10. How do you maintain and update your alumni information?

PROBE: Do you identify alumni by race, gender identity, their preferred pronouns ?

JIM

11. What factors typically encourage alumni to contribute more time or support to alumni associations?

PROBE: What approaches have you utilized that result in greater URM participation?

MATT

12. We have heard from some stakeholders about opportunities to participate in alumni affinity organizations. Are there Fulbright alumni affinity groups ? Could the availability of an affinity group impact URM alumni members' decisions to participate in alumni activities? (Why or why not?)

JIM

13. We have also heard from key stakeholders about mentoring programs. Are there Fulbright mentoring groups ? Could their presence increase URM alumni engagement? (Why or why not?)

MATT

That concludes our questions. Thank you, again, for joining us and for sharing your thoughts and insight with us. This type of feedback is very helpful to our research effort.

JIM

That's right, Matt. Thank you both so much for your time. We are looking forward to finalizing our research project and sharing the results with all of you in the months to come.

Appendix D

Alumni Interviewees' Contributions to Codes for Findings

		Interviewee code contribution								
Category	Code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Lack of engaging underrepresented alumni	Lack of personal contact	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	8
	Understanding UR struggles	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	6
	Needed mentorship early on	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	6
	Lack of HBCU outreach	7	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	10
	Lack of data collection on UR alumni	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	12
	Lack of social justice advocacy	4	1	0	3	3	2	0	0	13
	Lack of representation	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	1	9
	Involvement opportunities	Local chapter	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
	Association events	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
	In leadership role	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	4
	Involved in affinity group	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
	Started an affinity group	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leadership	Leadership as motivation for involvement	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	5
	Prefer programs to support career advancement	0	5	0	4	2	0	0	0	11
	Prefer networking socials	0	4	0	1	0	0	1	1	7

	Programming geared for older alumni	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Opportunities described to increase engagement	Creating more opportunities for involvement	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
	Provide mentoring	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Underrepresented alumni outreach on college campuses	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
	Interest in recruitment of new Fulbright	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	4
	Service opportunities	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	5
	Interest in orienting new alumni to FA	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
	Use more social media	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	4
	Get data and study alumni	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	Personalized communication	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	6
	Highlight diverse stories	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	4
Alumni support for FA	Very welcoming	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
	High degree of belonging	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
	Statements of strong commitment	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
Thoughts on alumni mentoring program	Opportunity to get more engaged	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	7
	Investing in future	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	4
	To facilitate networking and career advancement	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
	To help navigate Fulbright	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	4

	For recruitment and outreach	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Affinity groups	Alumni support for affinity groups	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
	Identity based	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
	For career advancement	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
	Too many is a problem	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	FA to support ones in existence	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
	List on website	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Useful for generating new ideas	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Already involved in one	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Frequency of Code Totals for Each Participant		40	22	15	20	24	17	13	19	170

Appendix E

Contributions to Codes for Findings and Recommendations by Experts on Alumni Associations

Code	Code Frequency by Alumni Expert			Total
	1	2	3	
Creating meaningful opportunities	0	1	1	2
Opportunities with varying time commitment	0	1	1	2
Solicit alumni data	8	6	3	17
Increase representation in leadership	1	0	0	1
Acknowledge shortfalls	1	1	1	3
Study and Reflect values of alumni	1	1	0	2
Listen to all voices	2	1	1	4
Study alumni values	1	2	1	8
Career advancement support	4	0	1	5
Alumni involvement in recruitment	3	1	1	5
Organizational self-study on DEI	0	0	1	1
Utilize web presence	1	0	0	1
Mentoring				
With time constraints	0	1	1	2
Call it something different	1	1	0	2

Provide a definition	0	1	1	1
Online mentorship	1	0	2	3
Transactional mentorship	1	0	0	1
Mentee to set goals for mentorship	0	0	2	2
Affinity Groups				
For career specific networking	1	1	1	3
Should be based on alumni needs	0	1	1	2
For connecting disenfranchised populations	0	1	1	2
For getting alumni into the greater fold	1	1	1	3
Total	27	21	21	69

Appendix F

Contributions to Codes for Findings and Recommendations by Fulbright Association Staff

Code	Code Frequency by Staff		Total
	1	2	
Limited data collection	1	2	3
Diversity task force	1	1	2
DEI Focus	1	1	2
Older Fulbright alumni	1	1	2
Organizational values	1	3	4
Affinity group concerns	1	1	2
Challenges to mentoring	0	1	1
More effective activities	1	0	1
Virtual engagement	1	1	2
Chapter leadership	1	1	2
Membership fee	1	1	2
Lack of representation	1	0	1
Leadership concerns for direction	1	0	1
Total	12	13	25