

Out for Undergrad (O4U) Guidelines on Organizational Public Statements

Overview

This guidance document is to support the Out for Undergrad (O4U) community in understanding how we manage public statement(s) regarding an issue of national or global impact for the LGBTQ+ students we serve and our volunteer organizers. In all cases, we are guided by our mission, vision, and values.

Communication is a means, not an end. When a stakeholder recommends that we make a public statement, we must first ask the question, “How can this communication support our mission?” Utilizing that core question as the lens for communication planning, we run less risk of being performative and have greater opportunity to serve the needs of our constituents. As social structures are changing dramatically, and as we face the complex demands of difficult discourse, we have a tremendous opportunity to create change for the better by speaking out of a place of discernment and courage.

We want to emphasize enacting measurable change rather than simply reacting to issues. O4U is both a catalyst and a stabilizing force in our community. The students we serve rely on our programs and services; our commitment to continuous self-assessment and improvement can be a steadfast source of hope and support. We never want our desire to communicate passionately to restrict our ability or capacity to provide services.

We must communicate within the legal framework in which we operate as a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. As such, we must avoid all political campaign activities and keep lobbying within permissible limits. We are expected to remain consistent regarding the purposes for which we solicit donor funds and sponsorship, in fact, when we publicly communicate anything, it needs to pass the test of whether it aligns with our charter.

We do not have complete oversight of our employees or volunteers, acting as agents (on our behalf or name) to express views that might expose O4U to liability for defamation, tortious interference, or otherwise reflect misalignment with our mission or hurt the reputation of the organization. Therefore, we aim to provide a guiding framework within this document, understanding that it will, and cannot be, all encompassing.

There will be times when we will, and should, express outrage. There will be times when we must resist the temptation to acquiesce and there are times when we do not have to speak. With mission top of mind and with these limitations, we have a great opportunity to provide thought leadership, to challenge outdated paradigms, to fight racism and other types of discrimination that hurt people. We want to be a leader in the evolution of how human beings treat one another first by reflecting upon and interrogating ourselves internally as individuals and collectively. We must resolve to do better by listening, advocating and appreciating. We have created these objectives to facilitate decision-making and responses.

Objectives



- To offer support for members of the O4U community, recognizing that O4U represents an incredibly diverse set of constituents
- To balance respect and advocacy recognizing intersecting identities that can enrich and complicate the discourse
- To reiterate the mission and values of O4U to internal and external constituents
- To have an understood and executable approach to communication especially during times of unrest and crises
- To create equitable space for members of the O4U community to discuss national and global issues that matter to them

Process

Any member of our community can suggest a topic for a public statement and/or submit a public statement for review. Before submitting, consider these questions to assist in expediting the response:

- How does this issue/event impact the O4U community?
- How does this incident, and others like it, relate to our mission?
- Which community members are calling on O4U to do/say something because they are facing particular challenges?
- Have you heard from stakeholders (students, volunteers, sponsors, alumni)?
- What are the short, medium, and long-term impacts of a statement?
- What is the cultural and/or historical significance of the topic on which the statement would be addressing?
- Is the issue/injustice/topic reoccurring/institutional or a single occurrence?
- What impacts will a public statement make on the internal community and/or on external constituents?
- What might be the best platform(s) to utilize internally and/or externally? Web, blog, social media, Presswire, Town Hall, webinar, etc.?
- Has O4U commented publicly on similar issues in the past?
- Is O4U's absence from the public dialogue noticeable?
- To what extent is this event/situation/incident cross-relevant with O4U focus on intersectionality?
- What impacts will a public statement, or lack thereof, have on our ability to be true to our mission and values for the O4U community across identities?

Furthermore, the chart below outlines how situations may be assessed. This acts only as an exemplar and was developed recognizing that all of the examples below impact the O4U community and its members. This exemplar should, by no means and under no conditions, be construed as either prescriptive of or limiting to any part of O4U's decision-making.

Priority 	Incident occurring at a Conference with a sponsor and student	Direct impact on the LGBTQ+ community	Direct impact on the O4U community
	Single incident of discrimination	On-going systemic racism	Direct impact on LGBTQ+ undergraduates
	Microaggressions	Incident impacting a small group or individual	Global issues and unrest (example: COVID-19)
		Impact 	

Action Plan

Once a request for statement has been submitted to the Executive Office from any member of the O4U community, a member of the Executive Office will:

- **Step One:** Identify and engage O4U leadership (including members of the executive team and the Board of Directors) to determine potential responses
- **Step Two:** Listen – hear the concerns being raised while recognizing personal and organizational impacts
- **Step Three:** Identify appropriate level of response
- **Step Four:** Execute response and intentional follow-up
- **Step Five:** Continue to listen and evaluate the needs of the community on an on-going basis
- **Step Six:** Evaluate efficacy of the crisis response and make adjustments as needed
- **Step Seven:** Create a centralized resource of statements, discussions around statements, and rationale. Creating a clear precedent and transparency in process
- **Step Eight:** Review past statements and decisions made to provide recommendations, enhance guidelines, and/or support future decision-making
- **On-going:** Communicate O4U's mission and values frequently

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