



P.O. Box 18177, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

Statement on 2025 Black Alumni Reunion

On Tuesday, March 4, 2025, the Ebony Bobcat Network (EBN) was informed that Ohio University had made the decision to “place on hold” the 2025 Black Alumni Reunion (BAR). EBN, its leadership, membership, and founders are very disappointed, frustrated, and disheartened by this decision.

In its statement announcing the decision, Ohio University referenced its receipt of the “Dear Colleague” letter that federally funded institutions of higher education across the country received from the U.S. Department of Education. The letter threatened investigation and discontinuation of federal funds for any university that continues to support programming around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Also at that time, the Ohio Legislature was in the process of considering Senate Bill 1 (SB1), which requires state institutions of higher learning to prohibit diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at publically-funded colleges and universities throughout Ohio. Since then, SB1 was passed by both the Ohio Senate and House of Representatives, and was ultimately signed into law by the Governor.

EBN vehemently disagrees with this law, the attack by the federal government on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the decision to place BAR on hold. The triennial event that brings Ohio University alumni together back on campus to reconnect with each other, engage with the University, and provide support to current students is a rich tradition dating back four decades to the 1980s when BAR began. All have been welcome to attend and participate in BAR, including all alumni, students, faculty, administrators, residents of the City of Athens, and anyone else who wanted to join the celebration of the culture and heritage that has greatly contributed to Ohio University.



P.O. Box 18177, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

The University has supported the planning, execution, and hosting of BAR practically from its inception. This has included providing staff resources that have contributed to the success of the event over the years. And EBN encourages its Alma Mater to continue its support of this important tradition!

Several of the events that take place during BAR are student-centric, and therefore planned and hosted by Ohio University student organizations. Some of those student leaders also have served on the BAR planning committee, including this most recent one. And it has been those students who have also expressed their disappointment in the University's decision.

Accordingly, these student leaders and organizations have taken on the responsibility, with the assistance of individual alumni, and support from the local Athens business community, to move forward with the celebration of rich culture and heritage that is so important to our community.

The Black Alumni Weekend celebration will take place in Athens, April 10-13, 2025, and will include:

- opportunities for students to network with alumni
- the premiere screening of the film, *Black Wall Street Athens, Episode 2*
- tours of locations significant to the Black heritage and history of Athens
- a variety showcase featuring the many talents of Ohio University students
- events associated with the 52nd Annual Athens International Film Festival

Alumni are encouraged to continue their support of our students, including by attending these events. And EBN will continue to do what it has since its inception: work to fulfill the tenets of our mission:

- generate financial support for our EBN Urban Scholarship Endowment



P.O. Box 18177, Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

- honor the heritage of generations of people of color within the University community
- support programs that work to increase the recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation of African American students, and
- engage in alumni programmatic activities

As an organization, EBN stands on the shoulders of John Newton Templeton, who in 1824 became the first Black college student in the Northwest Territory, and only the fourth Black man in the United States to receive a college degree when he graduated from Ohio University in 1828.

And EBN looks forward to working with our Alma Mater to determine how we can best continue to honor Templeton's great legacy, including through the tradition of the Black Alumni Reunion.

Sincerely,

The Ebony Bobcat Network National Board