Supporting and Retaining Traditionally Underrepresented Students

Custom Research Brief   July 14, 2011

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE
Jeffrey Martin

RESEARCH MANAGER
Sarah Moore

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief				
Institution	**Location**	**Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)**	**Carnegie Classification**	**Type**
College A	Midwest	12,100/11,600	Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)	Private
University B	Mid-Atlantic	4,300/2,700	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	Private
University C	Pacific West	9,000/5,800	Universities (larger	Private

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Observations:

Contact institutions provide at-risk and traditionally underrepresented students with academic support programs that prepare them for college-level work. These programs often take place during the summer before students' first semesters or during their first academic years and focus on key competencies such as reading, writing, and math.

Academic monitoring procedures allow contacts to identify students who may be at risk for withdrawing or failing and to arrange interventions accordingly. Some contact institutions establish dedicated referral systems for at-risk students, while others rely on periodic grade reports.

Contacts report that financial considerations often play a l
withdraw. Contact institutions attempt to mitigate this strain through scholarships. Contacts stress the importance of educating traditionally underrepresented students about how to obtain necessary financial resources and navigate the institution's administrative channels.

Peer mentor programs and organized peer groups offer an important form of personal support at most contact institutions. Contact institutions often include peer mentoring in structured support programs and pair younger students with older participants. The resulting social networks lead to an investment in campus life that can diminish the possibility of withdrawal.

Pairing students with faculty or staff role models can result in the formation of personal attachments to the campus community. Contact institutions structure interactions between students and faculty or staff members formally, such as through mentorships, as well informally, such as at social events during which the two groups mingle and discuss pertinent issues.

Contact institutions stress the importance of creating a multicultural campus environment that fosters the

III. PROVIDING ACADEMIC, FINANCIAL, AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

III. PROVIDING ACADEMIC, FINANCIAL, AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

Sustaining Summer Bridge Program Skills with First-Year Curricula

III. Providing A

III. PROVIDING ACADEMIC, FINANCIAL, AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

Personal Support

Contacts seek to facilitate the creation of social networks among traditionally underrepresented students, their peers, and faculty and staff members. These relationships reportedly stimulate student involvement in campus life and reinforce students' commitment to graduating.
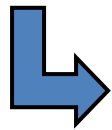
Peer Mentor Programs

Forging individual connections between young students and their older peers can prove crucial to students' academic success. Students who are further along in their college careers and have learned to navigate college life can often guide new students. Peer mentoring is the primary method by which contact institutions involve traditionally underrepresented students in retention efforts:

Draw mentors from among support-program participants.

At **College D**, older summer bridge and academic support program participants mentor younger participants throughout their academic careers. Similarly, recipients of the scholarship for urban students at **University B** are required to serve as mentors to first-year recipients during their sophomore years.

Provide training and financial incentives for mentors.

Given that mentors often must serve as counselors to their mentees, all contact institutions that have peer mentor programs provide training in how to interact with mentees and address crisis situations. In addition to training mentors, **College A** pays mentors for their work.

Strengthen bonds among mentees by creating group units.

At **College A**, each of the eight to ten mentors oversees eight to ten mentees. These family units engage in social activities together and attend weekly discussion sessions, at which speakers explore topics ranging from resume preparation to dining etiquette.

Require frequent contact between mentors and mentees.

Administrators at **College A**'s office of multicultural affairs require mentees to contact their mentors at least once every two weeks. Mentees may do so in person, by phone, through Facebook, or by some other mode of communication.

III. PROVIDING

III. PROVIDING ACADEMIC, FINANCIAL, AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

Connecting Students to Faculty and Staff Role Models

Faculty and staff members can play an important stabilizing role in students' lives. Contact institutions indicate that these adult role models interact with undergraduates in both formal and informal settings:

Formal Mentorships	Adults as well as students can serve as useful mentors to young undergraduates. A mentorship program at **University B** pairs traditionally underrepresented students with faculty and staff mentors who provide them with career and academic advice.

Informal Socialization	African-American faculty and staff members attend **College A**'s monthly men's free haircut night. They subtly guide conversation toward topics that are essential to academic and career success, such as study and job skills, résumé-writing, and proper business attire.

IV. CREATING A MULTICULTURAL CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Strategies for Integrating Traditionally Underrepresented Students into Campus Life

Contacts report two primary strategies for creating a campus environment in which traditionally underrepresented students may easily thrive. Contact institutions first offer positive support for students' cultural heritage, then facilitate cultural exchange and discussion between students from all backgrounds.

Build Cultural Capital

Contacts report that building the confidence, or cultural capital, of traditionally underrepresented students plays an important role in academic success. Contacts achieve this goal by celebrating students' racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, summer bridge and academic support program participants at **University C** visit African-American cultural destinations during the summer before their first semester.

Encourage Cross-Cultural Communication

Once traditionally underrepresented students feel confident about their own cultural history, contact institutions encourage them to share their perspectives with members of other racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Contacts offer various opportunities for engaging in this communication, such as discussion groups, speaker events, and international food tastings.

Program Offerings

Contacts utilize a number of program offerings, including discussion groups, orientation modules, speaker events, and required social-justice coursework, to pursue these strategies further.

Orientation Programming

Most contact institutions include a diversity module in required orientation programming. At **University B**, first-year students attend a session during orientation in which they discuss diversity and expectations regarding cross-cultural communication on campus.

Diversity Speaker Events

Every year, **College D** honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by awarding him an honorary degree. In conjunction with this event, administrators host a number of speakers who discuss social justice topics ranging from the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act to the legacy of Dr. King.

Small Discussion Groups

The multicultural center at **University E** holds a small group discussion session every week that anyone associated with the University may attend. A student and a staff or faculty member facilitate discussion and guide conversation towards issues such as xenophobia or the relationship of privilege to race and class.

Social Justice Coursework

A social justice course that all **University B** students must complete elicits active interrogation of multiculturalism and diversity from every student, regardless of their racial or ethnic heritage. Rather than remaining passive observers of diversity on campus, these students engage intellectually with the heterogeneous populations they find around them.

IV. CREATING A MULTICULTURAL CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Faculty Diversity and Providing Diversity Training

Most contact institutions report a scarcity of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff members. At **College A**, however, racially and ethnically diverse individuals comprise approximately 30 percent of all full-time faculty, mirroring representation in the student body.

Contacts at most institutions report that providing structured diversity training for faculty is a largely unmet need. Nevertheless, most institutions educate faculty in some manner about strategies for supporting the academic success of an ethnically and racially diverse student body:

> ### *Faculty Development Workshops*
>
> Administrators at **College D** conduct an annual workshop consisting of two presentations on diversity and small group discussion sections. They also offer a week-long workshop on expanding their curriculum inside and outside the classroom to maximize the academic success of Hispanic students.

> ### *Presentations at Faculty Meetings*
>
> The a dedicated retention officer reporting to the Provost at **University B** discusses the institution's growing population of urban, first-generation, and racial and ethnic minority students at faculty senate meetings. She reviews strategies for supporting the academic success of these students and provides follow-up information to interested faculty members.

> ### *Student Input and Extra-curricular Programming*
>
> Contacts at **College A** report that faculty members learn about diversity primarily through interaction with students who participate actively in programming offered by the office of multicultural affairs. In addition, some faculty members become acclimated to diversity on campus by attending events sponsored by the office.

IV. CREATING A MULTICULTURAL CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Strategies for Encouraging Non-Minority Participation

Involving non-minority students in multicultural initiatives can encourage cross-cultural communication and facilitate the engagement of traditionally underrepresented students with campus life. Contact institutions report a variety of strategies for attracting non-minority students to multicultural programming.

V.   PROGRAM FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Coordinating Diversity and Retention Initiatives

Responsibility for multicultural programming and retention initiatives for traditionally underrepresented students varies across contact institutions. Most institutions entrust the office of student affairs and the office of academic affairs each with responsibility for different programs.

Contacts report a variety of methods for bridging this administrative divide between student affairs and academic affairs. Most institutions call upon both academic affairs and student affairs personnel when staging events and administering retention programs. Some contact institutions also involve administrators from both divisions in formal groups that focus on retention and diversity. In addition, some contact institutions employ informal channels for coordinating efforts between the two divisions.

Joint Coordination of Events and Programs

Contact institutions often draw upon both student affairs and academic affairs personnel to administer events and programs:

- At **College A**, staff at the office of multicultural affiars invite racial and ethnic minority faculty members to an annual meet-and-greet with students.
- At **University E**,

V. PROGRAM FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Funding Sources and Uses across Contact Institutions

Most contact institutions draw primarily upon institutional budgets to fund diversity initiatives and retention efforts. These funds support retention among traditionally underrepresented and at-risk students by financing the employment of retention officers, multicultural centers, and summer bridge and academic support programs. Contact institutions also draw from donor gifts, state funding, and federal grants to support select programs.

Summer Bridge and Academic Support Programs	**College D** finances one of its summer bridge and academic support programs with appropriations from the state government. A large Title V
Mentorships for High School Students	