

**INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF  
MINORITY STUDENTS IN COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS  
PROGRAMS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS**

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At the 1999 and the 2000 annual conventions of the National Black Association of Speech, Language and Hearing, the students of color in attendance met with representatives of ASHA and NBASLH to discuss their experiences in the academic programs in our discipline. They described isolation, marginal participation in their programs, and cultural insensitivity by faculty. As a result of these meetings, in telephone conferences between NBASLH and ASHA we began to discuss the concerns raised by students of color.

All campuses are different, and there is no one formula for a successful academic climate; however, there are two important principles that can guide our efforts in the recruitment and retention of students of color. The first is leadership. We are our institution's leaders. We all are aware of the crucial role that leadership plays in improving recruitment and retention. Leadership from the Board of Trustees, from the President, from the deans, from the chairs, from the directors of academic units such as speech and hearing clinics, from the faculty is essential for there to be a deep and lasting change in our departments. In the 1989 book, *Minorities on campus: A handbook for enhancing diversity*, by

Madeline Green at the American Council on Education, this Checklist of Institutional Policies (Table 1) illustrates the extent to which there must be commitments to diversity made throughout the hierarchies of leadership.

**Table 1. Green's Checklist of Institutional Policies (1989)**

If the answer to the question on the checklist is yes, is the strategy or policy effective? How do you assess how well it is working? Do you have outcome data?

If the answer is no, would such an approach be important to your institution to improve the participation by individuals of color? How high a priority would you place on developing such a policy or strategy?

1. Is increasing minority participation an institutional priority? Has the governing board approved a policy designed to increase minority participation? Does it include specific goals? Has it been presented to the entire campus community?
2. Have the various colleges, schools, units, and departments developed policies and plans to improve minority participation? Are the unit plans centrally monitored and coordinated? Do they regularly assess and report their progress to the president and board?
3. Are there regular reviews of institutional progress by the president and board?
4. Are there individuals in various units or schools designated to identify and document problem areas and to recommend a course of action?
5. Is there routine collection of data on minority participation and dissemination of that data to the campus community?
6. Are admissions criteria and practices reviewed periodically to determine if they are consonant with increasing minority enrollments?
7. Are dormitory and campus life activities reviewed periodically to determine if they are consonant with the institutional effort to provide a climate that respects a pluralistic culture?

Making the nation's colleges and universities diverse, and our

departments more diverse, is not as much a national movement, as it is a local, a campus-by-campus, a department-by-department movement. As you know, one of ASHA's Focused Initiatives for 2001-2003 is increasing the number of members of ASHA who are from culturally and diverse populations. A significant component to the achievement of this goal is what occurs on our individual campuses and within our departments of communication sciences and disorders.

Thus, while one of the factors important for recruitment and retention is leadership, the other is institutional change (Green, 1989). What is apparent from those universities that have been most successful is the importance of department and university cultures changing in a multicultural dimension. We know the historical concern about quality and diversity. There has been the long held belief that quality and diversity are mutually exclusive goals (Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Many institutions and programs have strived to find diverse students who can succeed within the program's historical environment. Quite often institutions and departments have worried about having to relinquish or reduce their standards to which they have been historically committed. When such concern is present, students of color tend to bear the burden of adapting to the majority culture within campuses and departments. Therefore, the second principle important for recruitment and retention is change. Research has found that it is not enough to enroll students of color, we need to change the academic culture and climate within our universities and departments (Green, 1989; Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Universities and departments that are able to do

so are the ones that have truly evolved. In a truly pluralistic department, the burden and the rewards of adapting to our multicultural society are equally shared among administration, faculty, and students.

Diversity can be an emotionally charged and value laden arena and I applaud the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders for having a Working Group on Diversity, for its participation on ASHA's Subcommittee on Examination Performance. I applaud the Council for hosting this topic this evening

Faculty's values, beliefs, and responses are what shift the organizational structure to provide a more inclusive and productive academic environment. The role of faculty is crucial. Many students voice the perception that they are recruited because programs genuinely want to increase the numbers of students of color, yet once in the program, these students often feel disappointed because of the lack of fit between their experiences, behaviors, and beliefs and the program's experiences, behaviors, and beliefs.

In the American Council on Education publication, *Achieving quality and diversity*, Richardson and Skinner (1991) discuss three stages of institutional change or institutional adaptation. These are stages that universities and departments can go through as they strive for greater diversity without relinquishing their commitment to high standards of achievement for all students.

The first stage is a reactive stage (Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Programs realize the need to improve their diversity so recruitment, admissions, and financial aid strategies are implemented. Programs remove barriers to participation in order to ensure that their student populations more accurately reflect the composition of the local community or the nation. This is good. The program is not fully evolved yet but is in a good place.

Richardson and Skinner refer to stage two as the strategic stage. In stage two, the focus is on retention. There are often institutional efforts aimed at student support (e.g., appropriate advising, tutoring services for those students who need such assistance, cultural and racial/ethnic affiliations such as African American student associations). There are two objectives in stage two. One objective is to help students of color adjust to lessen the culture shock. A second objective is to change elements in the environment to make the institutions and programs less difficult to negotiate. This too is good. The program is not fully evolved, yet it is in a better position than those programs in stage one.

Programs and institutions in stage three are in the adaptive stage (Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Faculty leaders move their institutions and programs toward the third stage by developing academic programs more reflective of a multicultural society and by redesigning the learning climate and environment. The faculty understand that it is unrealistic and counterproductive

to expect students to do all the changing, so they, the faculty, accept the primary responsibility for change. How is this done?

One, cultural differences are accepted and valued in the curriculum and in the academic environment. The curriculum is broadened to infuse cultural and linguistic diversity. The choice of textbooks is important. If a chosen text is too eurocentric, you should assign projects on diverse populations to supplement. Two, students need faculty advocates. Three, faculty interactional styles and teaching styles have to change to adapt to students' learning styles. In the 1980s, Jacqueline Fleming published a text that examined the differences between historically black colleges and universities and majority white institutions. The major difference that she found was that in the historically black colleges classes are smaller and faculty have a much closer relationship with their students.

Four, many predominantly white programs do not have a racially diverse faculty. Efforts should be made to recruit faculty of color. When there are no faculty members of color, academic programs can invite speakers from the community; programs can invite nationally known speakers; and programs can send their students to the NBASLH conventions. Students need role models with whom they can interact, so they can be encouraged and motivated. When students of color are in predominantly white programs, it is important for them to see models of success in the discipline who look like them. It is important for all

students to be exposed to a diverse faculty, especially white students. Students need to see, interact with, and learn from faculty who are faculty of color.

Five, our faculty must become mentors and be mentored. Programs can provide training to white faculty to help them become more understanding of the needs of students of color, and their concerns. Faculty may not be aware of the importance and impact of the academic climate. Brown bag lunches and informal gatherings are ways to get the conversations going.

The term, academic climate, embraces culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies of the department. Research demonstrates that students who feel unwelcome or alienated and detached are unlikely to be successful. Changing the culture or climate of a department can be difficult and elusive but is essential. Do not have an inhospitable climate with the department. Gauge what is happening in the classroom, because the classroom is the central experience for all students, and faculty are the key. Faculty are the key to the recruitment and retention of students of color for our discipline. Faculty create the curriculum, faculty determine the quality of the learning experience in every classroom. The roles and responsibilities of faculty are them being teachers, mentors, advisors, role models, and advocates.

At the 11th conference of the Council, Lilly Cheng (1990), from San Diego State University, cited these eight challenges to faculty.

1. Am I prepared to teach culturally and linguistically and ethnically diverse students?
2. How do my instructional strategies reflect and accommodate the communication and learning styles of the diverse students?
3. Have I updated my knowledge and skills with regard to issues of diversity?
4. How do I evaluate my teaching effectiveness with diverse students?
5. How do my courses encourage positive interaction between myself and diverse students?
6. Does my course encourage positive interaction between students?
7. What methods do I use to encourage active participation and self-evaluation of all students?
8. Do my students receive frequent, timely performance-base feedback that supports improved performance?

### References

Green, M. (1989). *Minorities on campus: A handbook for enhancing diversity*. Washington: American Council on Education.

Fleming, J. (1984). *Blacks in college*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Richardson, R.C., & Skinner, E. (1981). *Achieving quality and diversity*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

### Comments from Audience

1. Does NBASLH send information to all the academic programs?  
Response: Yes

2. Is there only tacit agreement that diversity is important?  
It doesn't matter what trustees and the president do about diversity, as much as what faculty do.
4. In what ways do programs use the GRE for admissions?
5. It is important to address the need to recruit men into our professions. One participant described a grant he has been awarded to educate urban African American high school students to work as communication partners for patients with aphasia.
6. When we recruit it is important for men to recruit so young people can see that men are in the profession.
7. Partnerships between HBCUs and majority institutions can be helpful.  
The partnership could be via distance learning.
8. For recruitment, the gateway is the Intro course. Programs can use that course to recruit males and students of color
9. To increase minority enrollment on the graduate level, departments need to focus on the undergraduate level. Any ideas?  
**Response:** One program offers a speech intelligibility course. It brings in a lot of students. Another program described a course it offers, Culture of Disabilities in Contemporary Society, which attracts lots of students.
10. Programs should use department funds to support student travel to the NBASLH convention.
11. One program has begun participating in their university's initiative to recruit students from migrant families.
12. Programs can recruit men from courses such as linguistics and psychology.
13. Programs can take students on recruitment trips so the students to tell the prospective applicants about the program.
14. Our departments should participate more in university's programs, courses and initiatives, such as science initiatives.
15. There is the perception among students that the admissions criteria are lower now than in recent years.