
RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES FOR RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND ADDRESSING CONCERNS OF STUDENTS FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED MINORITY GROUPS

Faculty Committee of Minority Education, April 10, 2002

A. RECRUITMENT

1. HOSTING

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Identified by 5 of 6 responding colleges as a very effective recruitment tool. Identified as needing more funding, to expand scope and to include both Fall and Spring hosting periods. Need better identification of more and different faculty willing to be involved in hosting programs. Involvement of current URM students not uniform across colleges.

EXAMPLE USE, College of Engineering: "If we were to pick a single program that we believe makes a difference, it would be our on-campus hosting programs. We know that our success in recruiting a student increases when they have visited campus. We offer two hosting programs for underrepresented minority prospects. The first, offered in the fall, is a recruitment program to increase the number of applicants for early and regular decision. Prospective students, hosted by a current engineering student, visit campus for three days, attend classes, meet faculty, learn about research projects, participate in financial aid workshops and attend information sessions about the college. The second program, offered in the spring, is a similar program that attempts to increase the number and percentage of admitted URM students that choose to come to Cornell (yield). All the students that come to this program have already been admitted to the College of Engineering and have yet to make a decision about which school they will attend."

RECOMMENDATIONS: Encourage colleges to continue their support of hosting programs, and to further test their effectiveness by assessing the benefits of expanding programs from once per year to twice where requested. Encourage increased faculty awareness of these programs, and increased faculty participation as defined by those in charge of the programs. Involvement of current URM students should be strongly encouraged.

2. FOLLOW-UP CONTACTING OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Identified by all responding colleges as an effective personalized contact recruitment tool. Many forms used: e-mailing, direct mailing, personal letters, phonathons, contact by current students, staff, faculty.

EXAMPLE USE: "Direct mail contact, including "Holiday Greetings" cards to prospective students. These cards have been an effective way to build a personal relationship between the CALS' Minority Programs and Admissions offices and the prospective students. The cards, mailed in December, also reenforce quickly-approaching application deadlines for admission and financial aid."

RECOMMENDATIONS: Encourage colleges to continue these programs, and expand and strengthen after effectiveness has been evaluated. Assess whether more and different faculty want to be involved in such programs. Assess effectiveness of websites for their influence on recruiting students of color.

3. OUTREACH PROGRAMS

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Summer programs for high school students of many forms being used, but not by all colleges. These programs are cost and labor intensive, but thought to be very effective. These programs difficult to institutionalize: they frequently are instigated by external gifts and grant funding, and end when this funding ceases. In statutory colleges, some faculty have formal extension appointments with programs directed at students in programs for youth (eg. 4H), and junior and senior high school. Increased faculty involvement essential for continued success and growth of these programs.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Engineering: "CURIE Program -- Based on the need for K-12 outreach, we consider our CURIE Program, a one-week residential project-based summer program for approximately 40 high school girls (with a high percentage of minority participants) to be critical to our recruitment efforts. In the past three years, substantial efforts have been made to increase the number of under-represented students in the program and we have had fairly good results."

RECOMMENDATIONS: Encourage colleges to continue to support existing pre-college outreach programs, to leverage external funding to create additional programs of this type, and to institutionalize them in various ways including through extension services where applicable. Other units should consider institutionalization and direct faculty responsibility as an innovative approach to recruitment. Faculty with formal extension appointments in youth development could focus more effort on recruitment of URMs. Cornell University has extension offices in each county of the state and in New York City. The Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension should consider how to work with recruitment staff to better take advantage of our extensive network.

B. RETENTION

1. MENTORING

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Mentoring is a proven method of building bonds and improving comfort for individuals that find themselves in new situations. Mentoring, although time-intensive, is an effective way of easing transitions. Without formal mentoring arrangements, URMs often seek out a small number of faculty who have a reputation for being good mentors. These faculty are often overwhelmed with this additional responsibility.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Human Ecology: "Partnership Program - Faculty/student/staff mentor program targeted to support the first year transition for students of color (includes freshmen and transfers). Continuing students (who earn 3 credits) act as mentors in partnership with faculty. "

RECOMMENDATIONS: Colleges should consider how to more effectively use mentoring for URMs. This might involve mentoring faculty in the ways of mentoring URMs. Appropriate rewards should be given to those who assume the informal responsibility of mentoring and advising large numbers of URMs.

2. STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Several colleges have spoken of the importance of student associations as effective vehicles for providing mutual support and encouragement among current students as well as alumni groups.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Human Ecology: "The Association for Students of Color - has an outreach component that keeps new and continuing students connected to one another and services throughout the college. Also sponsors the Alumni/Student Forum which invites alums back to discuss their path through Cornell and how it prepared them for the world of work."

RECOMMENDATIONS: The University should continue to support and encourage existing and new efforts that foster student-student and student-faculty interaction and support.

3. EARLY INTERVENTION

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: One of the most frequently mentioned and valued strategies for promoting student retention is the early recognition of points at which students are in particular need of academic or personal support, and the provision of such timely support through a variety of effective means.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Arts and Sciences: "Early Warning Program for selected minority students. This Program targets a number of students for intensive academic support. Selected faculty and staff advise and carefully monitor the students' progress. Curricula include 00-level support sections for introductory courses, particularly in the first year. Also, these students are referred to the Learning Strategies Center for tutorial support in classes that do not have 00-level sections."

RECOMMENDATIONS: Course instructors should be alert for students in difficulty and refer them to the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) as well as appropriate staff in the colleges. Where not currently done, new students should be informed during orientation of the existence of these resources. Recommend continued strengthening of strategies for increasing awareness of student needs for particular types of academic or personal support, as well as appropriate methods for providing such early intervention in a timely fashion.

4. UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: Involving students in research is a proven method of increasing commitment to the field of study and to the institution. Encouraging students to present their research results at meetings provides a higher level of interaction that they would not experience in the classroom. Such meetings exist specifically for URM high school students and undergraduates, and are an effective place for faculty to recruit.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Engineering: "Learning Initiatives for Future Engineers (LIFE) in the College of Engineering is dedicated to supporting co and extra-curricular instructional and research programs that enhance the engineering educational experience. One of LIFE's goals is to help underrepresented and women students facilitate instruction and research based relationships with faculty. All students should be given the opportunity to engage in hands on experience and scientific inquiry - the process of science. Undergraduate research provides both of these opportunities and helps students see the relevance and application of their core course work. This ability to focus on the outcomes of an engineering education increases student persistence leading to better retention and graduation rates. The College, therefore, is an active participant in the Cornell Presidential Research Scholars Program (which impacts both recruitment and retention) and has its own alumni and corporate sponsored undergraduate research programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Colleges should evaluate the opportunities for URM involvement in research, and encourage both students and faculty to attend meetings where URMs gather to present their findings. Cornell should have a visible presence at national meetings of this type.

C. PROCEDURES FOR ADDRESSING STUDENT CONCERNS

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS: The colleges appear to feel strongly that there should not be a special grievance procedure for minority students. However, we also received clear indications that minority students feel strongly that existing procedures could be risky and might be ineffective. There is fear of retribution, and a feeling that assertion of grievance does not always result in the person in power being asked to correct the problem, or even finding out about it. Formal grievance procedures already exist, but what is needed are mechanisms for resolution of problems related to interpersonal relationships, insensitivity and miscommunication.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM, College of Engineering: "The College of Engineering has implemented a Safe Haven program as part of its ongoing efforts to sustain a supportive environment for college community members. A group of faculty and staff have been trained to serve as resources in situations when members of the college's community (students, staff and faculty alike) feel their ability to work, learn, grow or study is compromised. The safe havens are available to listen to individuals' concerns and discuss possible resources or actions that might help resolve the situation. While not a formal grievance process, the Safe Haven program is meant to prevent potential grievances or, if those efforts fail, to assist community members in finding the appropriate resources to remedy their problem (including the possibility of filing a grievance.)"

RECOMMENDATIONS: Each college should develop Safe Heaven-like mechanisms where students, both undergraduate and graduate, can find support and share concerns without fear of retribution, and students/faculty/staff should be made aware of the existence of such programs.
