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Retention: Revisited and Reaffirmed for the Minority/Majority Student

Nadine F. Jenkins

Sul Ross State University

"Retention of the minority student is a complex issue and requires new approaches and analyses."

This session focuses on strategic considerations for the retention of the emerging new student population. The presentation described is intended to address the under represented and under prepared students who can be identified based on their educationally and financially disadvantaged status as those who have traditionally exhibited lower than usual adjustment, retention and degree completion rates.

The recruitment and retention of minority/majority students, who have traditionally been under served and under represented, has become a growing concern among colleges and universities. Higher education communities, facing the challenge of declining enrollment resulting from a myriad of external and internal factors, are seeking to improve their recruitment and retention efforts to abate this trend. In order to maintain a strategic posture in a very competitive market, colleges and universities must embrace a different position, attitude and commitment in order to achieve optimum enrollment outcomes—and the key to this success lies with this under served and under represented student population.

Declining enrollments, as well as changes in the characteristics of student populations, for the past few years have validated these changes and accentuated the need to maintain an enrollment that will allow for healthy financial resources. In order for colleges and universities to recruit, enroll, retain and graduate students, new strategies for projecting and managing the enrollment of the minority /majority students are essential.

The goal of every conscientiously committed higher education institution for educational equality should be to ensure the design and implementation of an effective intervention system that will assist students in assimilating into the academic and social life of the university so that the rate of persistence to graduation for all students will increase.

An understanding of the subject of this presentation necessitates a discussion of strategic enrollment management. Strategic enrollment management, from my perspective, refers to a systematic and comprehensive process designed to achieve and maintain optimum recruitment, retention and graduation rates of students, given an institution's academic policies, resources and commitment. The synergy between quality education and student development is the preeminent requirement for successful enrollment management. In this regard, retention is the result of substantial and rewarding educational experiences in and outside of the classroom. Since retention focuses on past-enrollment process, the central concern of recruitment is on pre-enrollment efforts. Conceptually and operationally, recruitment, retention and the entire collegiate experience are inextricably interfaced. While it is usually erroneously assumed

that decline in enrollment is due primarily to external factors; it is probably more the result of internal barriers and failures.

Retention of the minority /majority student is a complex issue and requires new approaches and analysis. The most critical factor is: Students, their needs, wants and degree of satisfaction. Schools have traditionally utilized a comparative "benchmark" model for measuring their success. However, retention requires a much more broad qualitative measure of responsibility to students, which is both complex and nebulous. While there is no magical formula, there are factors that will enable and enhance enrollment management. Identification of students involves those who are persisters; this strategy begins with effective public relations and recruitment activities, and institutional commitments that are aimed at recruiting, retaining and graduating minority /majority students. For those non-persisting students, every effort should be expended to ascertain the reason or reasons. To this end, informed decisions can be made and appropriate actions implemented. For this reason and many others, retention analysis is not only beneficial, it is essential.

Retention is a result and not just a quantitative goal. Measures of success should not be quantitative, but should also include qualitative information. Innovative strategies will need to focus more on students and their total satisfaction, of which the most significant ones do not necessarily lend themselves to quantification. Managing enrollment requires an understanding of the "new kind of students." New in kind, type, attitude, aspiration and belief about higher education and its role in their aspiration.

More importantly, the effectiveness of the approach will be evident in its practice and intrusive nature of proposed programs and services that will enable and encourage students to be socially and academically successful. In summary, it is the qualitative analysis that defies traditional approaches and beliefs that are pivotal in making the difference, both for the minority /majority student and for higher education institutions.

PRESENTER:

Nadine F. Jenkins assumed the newly created position of vice president for Enrollment Management and Student Services at Sul Ross State University, in Alpine, Texas, on September 1, 1998. She previously served as vice provost and associate professor of Education at the University of Texas at Arlington. College education culminated with undergraduate and Master of Education degrees from Lamar University and Doctor of Education degree from the University of North Texas in 1976. Dr. Jenkins has extensive experiences in education including serving as special assistant to the Vice President at Temple University and superintendent, Louisiana Bucknell University, Aurora University and Kentucky Educational Television. Dr. Jenkins is a consultant in the area of developmental disabilities and a frequently invited speaker at professional conferences on a variety of topics. She has numerous professional citations and awards including recognition in the: 1995 Texas Hall of Fame; 1999-2000 Who's Who of American Women; 1996 Woman of the Year; 1992-1993 Who's Who in American Education; 1991-1992 Outstanding Young Women of America; selected participant in the 1996-1997 Class of Leadership Texas; and 1997-1998 Class of Leadership Arlington. Dr. Jenkins served as a community member of Site-Based Decision Committee for Lamar High School; board member of Wesley Foundation at The University of Texas at Arlington; city appointee to Youth and Families Board; board member for Theatre

Arlington; vice president for Executive Women in Texas Government; program chair for League of Women Voters; and Arlington School District Board Appointee to Futures 2010 Committee. She was the first female African American in Arlington, Texas to be elected to public office as a board member of the Arlington Independent School District.