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11-6-2002

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Williams, Keith, "The Potential Role of Minority Student Organizations in the Recruitment and Retention Process at Urban Universities" (2002). *Seventh Annual National Conference, POCPWI* . Paper 10.
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The Potential Role of Minority Student Organizations in the Recruitment and Retention Process at Urban Universities

Abstract

In 1992, the Department of Chemistry at Wayne State University developed an office to address the issue of minority student recruitment and retention in the sciences. The Initiative through the success of its programming revealed that minority student organizations were instrumental in student retention at both the college and pre-college levels. Moreover, an unintended consequence of this synergy is the recruitment of minority students to the university.

Keith Williams
Director Office of Minority Student Initiatives, Department of Chemistry, Wayne State University

In 1992, the Department of Chemistry at Wayne State University developed an office to address the issue of minority student recruitment and retention in the sciences, the Office of Minority Student Initiatives Department of Chemistry Wayne State University (Initiative). The emphasis of this office was the following:

* Assist students enrolled in science courses
* Advise selected student organizations in the WSU College of Science
* Develop targeted programs outside of WSU College of Science
* Recruit students into the Chemistry curriculum at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
* Develop programs to reinforce the science taught primarily in the

On the campus of Wayne State, student organizations such as the National Organizations for the professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, National Society of Black Engineers, the student affiliate HIE, the WSU Black Convocation Committee, and the WSU National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and WSU student affiliate of Black Business Students, have all been instrumental in the implementation and the success of the Initiative's programming at the pre-college level.

Largely, due to the support of these student organizations, the following projects have been offered by the Initiative to pre-college students, primarily in the Detroit Public School system.

<u>American College Preparation Course</u> This course covers all aspects of the ACT as well as provides students with examination strategies. The class size average is about 80 students. Moreover, participant's composite score is around 23, which is higher than the state and DPS average.

Science Project Developmental Workshops Students from the STARS program and the Detroit Pre-college Engineering Program are solicited to take part in workshops to assist them as they develop science projects, generally for the Metropolitan Detroit Science and Engineering Fair. Students are paired with a mentor and meet as a group monthly to address issue pertaining to their science projects. This program averages about 45 students annually.

Wayne State University Science Bowl This science bowl is a trivia style tournament involving 3-4 student teams. This project allows students to showcase their knowledge with emphasis on science, mathematics, engineering, technology and inventors of African descent. In 2002, the number of participants increased from 200 to 300 students. The winning teams are generally, funded to compete at the national competition sponsored by the NOBCChE and on occasion, the senior team competes in the Department of Energy National Science Bowl held annually in Washington DC.

Chem Demo - This program is designed to reinforce and introduce learners to concepts in science particularly chemistry. Also, to provide students with hands-on activities to show how chemistry is integrated into everyday life.

Summer Enrichment Programs - Annually, the WSU School of Engineering and other programs asks the Initiative to structure 4 - 8 week, chemistry courses with laboratories for its summer enrichment participants. Each week, students are provided with 2 or 4 day lecture and a weekly lab session. The Initiative not only supports the course and the materials, it also develops the curriculum and recruits the staff needed to offer this component for both programs.

Last year, the Initiative interacted with over 2,700 science and engineering professionals, pre-college educators and administrators, parents and students. This numoer of interactions and experiences was largely achieved by the support of volunteers that drives the Initiative namely, college student organizations and alumni. Moreover, an unintended consequence of this synergy is the recruitment of minority students and faculty to the university.

As an urban commuter university, Wayne State has idea aspects in terms of its student body that makes the support of Initiative programming possible. The total enrollment of Wayne State University is approximately 30,000. Students of African descent comprise about 20% of the Wayne State University Student Body. Annually, Wayne is ranked as one of the top ten universities in terms of producing minority bachelor degree students nationally. While these total numbers may be impressive, the attrition rate at Wayne is as high or higher than most majority institutions. In fact, the development of the Initiative is the direct relationship of the lack of minority students majoring and graduating in the sciences.

Finally, a student organization who is extremely vital to Wayne is the Black Convocation Committee. This group plans and sponsors the Black Convocation. The event is modeled after a ceremony initiated by students at the University of Southern California. Wayne has the longest continual running event of this kind in the state of Michigan, 10 years. This event honors those students who preserved and obtain a degree from Wayne. The event is afro centered and has a pre-college recognition component. Any Wayne State graduating student can attend this event, resulting in an increase of cultural diversity on the campus.

Presenter

Keith Williams has been the director of the Office of Minority Student Initiatives Department of Chemistry (Initiative) since its inception in 1992. The Initiative has provided Keith with a vehicle that is becoming increasing influential in the area of reinforcing science taught on the campus of the university and in the Detroit community.

The Initiative has afforded him the opportunity to create a forum where students at both the college and pre-college can express their knowledge of science locally, regionally and nationally. He has mentored over 50 African American students who have gone on to receive undergraduate and graduate degrees. Furthermore, he has mentored over 125 pre-college students through various summer enrichment and year round programs offered by the initiative; many of whom have gone on to college to major in science, mathematics, engineering and technology fields.

He has worked with federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation, NASA and the Department of Energy to promote science as part of agency programs such as the Alliance Minority Participation, Michigan Space Grant Consortium and the National Science Bowl respectively.

As part of the faculty of the Wayne State University Department of Chemistry, he serves as the faculty advisor to a number of student organizations such as the student affiliate of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE), the Black Convocation Committee (BCC) and the College of Science Student Association (COSSA),.as well as serve on a number of university committees. His formal training WA'S as a scientist in the area of physical chemistry and material science. As a researcher co-sponsored by Ford Motor Company Glass Division he was awarded two U.S. and one-world patents for his work in producing Titanium Nitride films using Atmospheric Pressure Chemical Vapor Deposition techniques.