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November 2004

## Struggling with Declining Diversity in Professional Programs

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Squires, Sandra K. and Landis, Melodee, "Struggling with Declining Diversity in Professional Programs" (2004). *Ninth Annual Conference POCPWI (2004)*. 20.

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## **Struggling with Declining Diversity in Professional Programs**

### **Abstract**

*In 2001, women faculty began a study of minority enrollment in UNO's College of Education. They'll overview their demographic analysis, review of the literature, interviews, collaborative efforts with Latino and Native American community agencies and other struggles as white women trying to address the decline of diversity in their institution.*

**Sandra K. Squires, Ed. D. Professor, Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska**

### **Melodee Landis, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor, Teacher Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha Omaha, Nebraska

Across the nation, many teachers' colleges and other professional schools are experiencing a decline in the number of minority enrollees in their programs. Three faculty members at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) formed a Research Triangle in January, 2001, to study the declining minority enrollment in the College of Education: Other faculty and students have come and gone from the study group, but the three original leaders remain. As the team studied the demographics they found that minority enrollments across the whole campus had decreased drastically in recent years. And as the group worked, they found they also need to look beyond their own field and university to the experiences and research being gathered in other professional fields and in other locations across the nation. When they did this, they discovered that other institutions across the country have suffered and are suffering similar problems.

During this presentation, Drs. Squires and Landis will overview current demographic data, present other findings of their study of the issue and share information on possible approaches to the dilemma. Over the past two years, in collaboration with other faculty and staff, they conducted interviews, surveyed the literature and attended events in order to better understand the factors that have contributed to this problem. They worked with a local Chicano center to help write a grant for funding and generated other research and programmatic ideas they presented to various minority groups.

The presentation will begin with the presenters highlighting alarming data about minority enrollment at UNO and nationwide. This data shows a decline in the number of students of diversity seeking professional degrees. They will feature insights from June Gordon's book *The Color of Teaching* and other publications which have implications for all professional fields facing a similar decline in diversity.

As the researchers tried to gain some insight into the problem, they found that some of their missteps were as revealing as their successes. For example, when the group tried to pilot a survey exploring the attitudes of teachers about minorities and teaching, they found that almost everyone who responded to the pilot survey felt they had no attitude problems or biases concerning minorities or teaching as a profession. The group decided that little meaningful information would be gained from this approach and went back to the drawing board.

Other insights were gathered from a variety of community and school resources in the metropolitan community and will be discussed as well. These leaders shared their understanding of the motivations and concerns of Latinos, Black Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans as they consider their future careers and schools of choice. Since there are issues unique to each of these groups, each group will be discussed briefly.

After featuring a variety of ideas and programs that may be helpful in reversing trends toward declining diverse enrollments in higher education, there will be an opportunity for the participants to discuss the information presented. A series of questions for discussion will help to personalize and stimulate the discussion.

#### Presenters

Dr. Sandra Squires is a specialist in the areas of behavioral disorders and secondary and adult persons with disabilities. These subjects comprise her primary teaching responsibilities. She has also taught courses in human relations, administration of special education, and women's studies. She is a member of the Women's Studies and Native American Studies faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and has served in many leadership roles related to diversity and equity in education.

Dr. Melodee Landis teaches educational foundations and instructional technology undergraduate and graduate courses at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has served on gender equity task forces, multicultural advisory groups and women's commissions and has had an intense interest in equity issues throughout her career as a secondary teacher, educational administrator and university instructor.