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The MLO Model: A College-Level Approach to University Minority Student Affairs

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Traditionally, predominantly White institutions developed and operated Minority Student Affairs offices and other Educational Opportunity programs to serve as the "One-Stop" resource location for the entire institution. While such a model has proven effective in most instances, it is not always proactive and certainly does not allow for careful assessment of students' needs within their given academic discipline. In 1992, Iowa State University convened an ad hoc committee to review services provided to ethnic minority students at critical periods in their enrollment history. The committee identified several general themes as well as a number of specific recommendations for change. Two general themes emerged. First, problems which confront all students have a disproportionate impact upon ethnic minority students who have not been included in informal support networks such as mentoring, study groups, etc. Secondly, students were more satisfied and interacted better when they formed a strong attachment to their college and academic department. As a result the university adopted a model for addressing these themes while providing services to ethnic minority students which relies on centralized leadership and coordination with services delivered as close to and as much a part of the learning process as possible.

The Minority Liaison Office (MLO) model described in this presentation is a more proactive model that in many ways "decentralizes" the role of the university's Minority Student Affairs office by placing key concepts of minority student affairs in each of its seven colleges. The aim of the MLO model however is not to take away from the effectiveness of the minority student affairs program, but offers instead a way to orchestrate such principles to build its strength and resources into the fabric of each college.

Within the MLO model, leadership and responsibility for minority student achievement is ultimately the responsibility of the academic deans of the college. Authority is delegated to faculty members and to a Minority Liaison Officer (MLO). Faculty participation with leadership and support from the academic dean(s) and the MLO determine the success of the model for a learning environment where diversity is valued and individuals are inspired. Each college can establish policies and procedures unique to their own needs which will enhance diversity, faculty participation and student achievement.

The Minority Liaison Officer's primary responsibility is to provide the leadership to faculty and staff as they work to create an environment in which an increased emphasis

on minority student participation is matched by comprehensive and systematic strategies to help students achieve. The actions of the MLO are carried out with consultation and concurrence of the college dean. As a support service provider, it is imperative that the MLO not only offer comprehensive programs and services, but also teach students how to achieve their optimal potential.

The Minority Liaison Officers are housed in each college, which allows them to build a relationship with students, faculty and staff. As part of the college, the MLO is better able to analyze the culture and direction the college should take to be more inclusive and articulate such needs and concerns to the college's administration. The actions and aspirations of all faculty and staff involved in the model should push the college and its departments beyond the "safe" objectives to more challenging objectives with respect to minority student participation and achievement.

The exact duties of the MLOs vary depending upon the needs, expectations and support of the college. In all cases, the MLO guides and refers students from their admission to the college through their departure from it, to resources that better insure their success. Such referral includes, but is not limited to financial aid, minority student affairs resources, university tutoring services and personal counseling.

In some cases, especially in the "smaller" colleges, it is possible to spend more time tutoring, mentoring and counseling individual students. In the College of Family and Consumer Science and in the College of Education for example, the MLOs make personal phone class to students at critical points during the semester as well as provide social, educational and cultural programming. The MLOs of these colleges spend a great deal more time providing personal counseling and direct services to individual students. Larger colleges like the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Business are limited by their size to mainly providing academic and/ or cultural programming. The MLO model opens the university to broader minority leadership, vision, position of power and productivity while reducing what might be perceived as institutional rigidity in coping with the unique needs of students in its colleges. The true advantage of this model, however is that the college has the opportunity to manage its own culture and directly determines the role and impact of its own actions upon its minority student constituents.

PRESENTERS:

Lee Ann Davis is the minority coordinator in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University. She has been the minority liaison officer for two years. Prior to her current position, Davis served as a minority program assistant in the Department of Residence at Iowa State University. An Iowa native, she holds a B.A. in Sociology from St. Ambrose University. She is currently completing her M.S. in Educational Leadership and Policy Study at Iowa State University.

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