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## Student Retention is Everybody's Business: Retention of Students of Color Must be Our Mission

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# **Student Retention is Everybody's Business: Retention of Students of Color Must be Our Mission**

## **Abstract**

*This presentation addresses issues in the retention of students of color at predominantly white institutions. Participants will receive a bibliography of retention literature, and, after a brief presentation of the literature, will discuss the problems and proposed solutions to the ongoing challenge of minority student attrition.*

## **Brenda Vincent Cross**

Director of Development, College of Sciences and Arts, Michigan Technological University

This presentation addresses issues in the retention of students of color at predominantly white institutions. Participants will receive a bibliography of retention literature, and will discuss the problems and proposed solutions to the ongoing challenge of minority student attrition. The retention of all college students has grown in importance and urgency during the last ten years. The recruitment and retention of students of color has remained of great concern to colleges and universities for the last two decades, and has grown in significance in the last five years.

As we look at history, today's reality, and into the future, it is important for us to be keenly aware of how history, current attitudes, values, behaviors, strategies, plans, and expectations impact the future. In 1905, writing in Life of Reason and Reason in Common Sense, George Santayana said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In higher education, surely we do not want to repeat the mistakes of our past. One way to assure that we learn from the mistakes and successes of the past is by deliberately studying what did and did not work, and building the future on that foundation.

It is impossible to adequately address the broad array of factors that are identified in the literature as significant in the retention of students of color in the 30-40 minutes allocated. However, it is possible to provide a synthesis of the strategies highlighted in the literature, to spark a lively discussion of the statistics and strategies presented, and to mount a convincing argument for greater action and activism among professionals of color and our allies in higher education institutions.

The goal of this paper is fourfold:

1. To highlight minority student retention research
2. To identify key problems/ obstacles/barriers to graduation
3. To identify some solutions to the problems
4. To inspire professionals to take as our MISSION the retention/ graduation

of students of color.

This will be an interactive presentation, and participants will be encouraged to take an active part in the exploration of ideas to create a new synergy for the benefit of students of color everywhere. The challenge to professionals of color is to grow beyond the status quo in order to help our students stay in school and graduate. To do that, we must make minority student success more than just our job; it must become our MISSION!

### **Presenter**

**Brenda Vincent Cross** has held various positions in higher education since the mid 1980s. She has been the Director of Development for the College of Sciences and Arts at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan since May 1999. Prior to that she was at Suomi College (now Finlandia University) in Hancock, Michigan, first as Career /Transfer Counselor, then Director of Student Support Services, and last .as Dean of Students and Director of Student Support Services. Her previous higher education experience includes eight years at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia as Director of Minority Affairs and Pre-College Program Director. Her corporate experience includes more than 10 years with AT&T Long Lines, primarily in a marketing capacity.

Her doctoral research was a longitudinal study of the academic progress of 27 at-risk college students, and is detailed in her dissertation, titled Developing and Piloting a Freshman Success Course.

She is an educator, a researcher, a fundraiser, a volunteer, an activist, a wife, a mother, and a concerned African American citizen. Her goal is to sound the alarm about the urgent need to renew active commitment to education in the Black community.