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Leaving Them Hanging: Why Predominantly White Institutions Fail To Retain Minority Students

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Leaving Them Hanging: Why Predominantly White Institutions Fail To Retain Minority Students

Abstract

The purpose of this workshop is to help those professionals who work with and for minority college students. This workshop will examine: 1) institutional recruitment strategies; 2) campus climate and similar issues; 3) problems associated with retaining minority students; 4) the campus community and 5) keys to retaining minority students.

John Leonard Harris

Founder and Principal Consultant, Harris Consulting Services

Academic scholars in the early 1960s and 1970s were adamant in their belief that students who did not succeed in higher education did so because of a lack of preparation before college. In the 1980s and in the 1990s, it was determined that there must be other factors which help to determine whether a student, particularly a racial minority student, will be successful in higher education. Those factors are: 1) positive self-concept, 2) realistic self-appraisal, 3) understanding of the ability to deal with racism, 4) preference for long-term goals over more immediate, short-term needs, 5) availability of strong support person, 6) successful leadership experience, and 7) demonstrated community service.

It is important that the experiences that a student encounters on a college or university campus reflects, at least in part, what is actually happening in the “real world.” The collegiate experience must not become an escape for students from the realities that they will face after their college days are over. The basic equation for success is quite simple- STUDENT + EXPERIENCES = EDUCATION. The bottom line is that the colleges and universities must do a better a job of providing experiences for students that help them to develop intellectually and mature socially.

The challenge for colleges and universities in the 21st Century is not just how to teach our students how to work in the world, but how to help them understand how to live in the world. College students must understand how to live as effective, conscientious adults. Though this responsibility is primarily that of parents, institutions of higher learning can, and should make a significant contribution to the development of its students. Anything less is a disservice and a disgrace.

Many racial minority students at predominantly white colleges and universities are not making the grade because they are not being stimulated and encouraged academically from the beginning of their college careers. And more importantly, they are not personally challenged and held accountable for their nonchalance as it relates to academics.

Today’s minority college students must begin to understand what a privilege it is to have the educational opportunities that were not afforded their ancestors. Additionally, they must be constantly reminded of the significance of their success on generations to come.

Failure is not an option and should not be acceptable. The price that was paid for today's students was far too great for the current state of affairs to continue without interruption.

Predominantly white institutions have a responsibility to the minority students they recruit. However, the motivation for success lies with the students and those who care most about them. Most these students need a plan, which most do not have. And without a plan, failure is not only possible, it is probable.

Presenter

John Leonard Harris is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts from the University of Missouri-Columbia and his Master of Education degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has been married to his wife, Charlene for nineteen years and they have four children. Mr. Harris is the Founder and Principal Consultant for Harris Consulting Services through which he provides cultural education, leadership, organizational effectiveness and motivational programs. He is also Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, Inc., a faith-based nonprofit organization that serve as an active agent of hope and renewal for the forgotten, undervalued, unappreciated, and disadvantaged in our society. Additionally, Mr. Harris partners with churches, community organizations and state agencies whose mission is to serve low-income families and at-risk youth. Mr. Harris is an award-winning writer and local newspaper columnist. He is a popular keynote and conference speaker. His presentation topics range from religion to rap, media to motivation, family to freedom and self-esteem to service.