Chapter 2

Minority Recruitment and Retention Among Gifted Students

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ABSTRACT

Consistent with the national goal implemented by our current government, Auburn University is also working to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities in higher education. The rationale for this is simple, that is to allow a greater advantage when competing against others. One of the ways to foster this competition is by nurturing our gifted underrepresented minority students. In the 2010-2011 school year, the Honors College, which serves as a gateway for underrepresented minority students, developed a distinct focus on helping our students reach and their educational/academic goals. Within this paper we will go over some of the steps we have begun to take to reach our goal, in addition to future plans we have to continue these efforts.

BACKGROUND

Historically there has been an inequality that exists among minority students when education is examined. Previous issues have been in the form of tracking which has unfortunate consequences because it puts underrepresented students at a disadvantage. More recently, traditional curriculum tracking is on the decline, the content students learn and achievement outcomes are still differentiated by race and class (Gamoran, 2001; Lucas & Berends, 2002; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Unfortunately this differentiation follows students into higher education and the labor market, influencing the choices they make. Lucas and Berends (2002) have documented de facto tracking where instead of division according to academic, general and vocational tracks, schools offer multiple levels of academic courses (such as mathematics) with some options (e.g. Calculus), being more rigorous than others (e.g. Consumer Mathematics), and with minority—especially Black—students being disproportionately more likely to be enrolled in the latter than the former. Regrettably there is a trend of minority students becoming the victims of misperceptions about achievement levels, being subject to negative attitudes, and getting less encouragement than other students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Good, 1981; Payne, 1994; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Unfortunately schools contribute to the imbalance of power in society by communicating society's economic, political and cultural knowledge to students (Apple, 2004).

The importance of schools is more prevalent in regards to economic issues because the United States (U.S.) is becoming more diverse (Phinney & Alipura, 1996) and globalization has made it disadvantageous to continue to foster inequality of educational opportunity along ethnic lines. The National Academy of Engineers (2004), an organization that advises the government on issues concerning engineering, stated that if the U.S. is to maintain economic leadership and be able to sustain its share of high-technology jobs, it must prepare for a new wave of change.

A key population that will help in maintaining economic leadership among minority students are those who participate in Honors Programs or classes. Since the population of minority students in these classes and programs are so few, particularly at Predominately White Institutions (PWI) such as Auburn University, these students need to be treated with sensitivity. Ways that have proven to help with this are clubs, support groups, and mentors. Within school settings since the climate of a school has been proven to make a difference in school achievement (Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, & Beady, 1978) the academic norms within the school system, such as expectations and beliefs must be catered to in a variety

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