

102608 Men of Color

Diverse: Issues in Higher Education

From Diverse Online: http://diverseeducation.com/artman/publish/article_11884.shtml

Gathering Examines Lack of Minority Men in Post-Graduate Programs

By Mike Wells

Oct 27, 2008, 22:01

The differences between men and women aren't all that difficult to spot. Still, minority women far outnumber minority men in post-graduate degree programs – four to one on some U.S. campuses. So why do most colleges take the same approach with both sexes when it comes to recruiting and retaining minorities in post-graduate programs?

Two experts on minority enrollment offered their insights at a panel discussion Saturday at The Compact for Faculty Diversity's 15th Annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring. More than 1,000 guests attended the four-day conference in Tampa, Fla. It is the nation's largest annual gathering of minority doctorate holders.

"Men of Color in the Academy: Helping Them Succeed" was among many panel sessions offered at this year's event, which was hosted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), based in Atlanta, Ga., and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, based in Boulder, Co.

Panelist Michael Cuyjet, an associate professor of educational and counseling psychology at the University of Louisville, Ky., transformed his study into a book, "African-American Men in College."

His research found minority women were more likely than minority men to interact with faculty and spend out-of-class time in the library or with student organizations. Women also tended to hold more officer positions in Black student organizations.

Faculty and administrators need to know where minority males go after class and reach out to them there, he said.

"If the brothers are hanging in the gym, you go to the gym," Cuyjet said. "... A lot of young men come onto campus and assume they will not do well. We have to let these young men know they matter to these institutions."

Several factors undermine the success of minority male students, including under preparedness for college coursework and culture clash. But it doesn't have to be that way, said LeManuel Bitsoi, director of minority training at Harvard University.

"I think this is about image," he said. "I think this is about stereotyping and profiling, if you will."

Bitsoi, a member of the Navajo Nation, wrote "Success Factors of Native American Men at Harvard College." His study found Native Americans made up slightly more than 1 percent of the nation's college enrollment population in 2005-06 and received the lowest percentage of the total degrees conferred – 0.008 percent – making them the least likely minority to graduate.

He encouraged minority students to seek out cultural groups, programs and activities on campus. It can mean the difference between succeeding in college and feeling like an outsider, he said.

"We seek out role models and then we end up becoming role models ourselves," Bitsoi said.

The SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program helped more than 700 doctoral students since it began in 1993. At the time, there were very few minority faculty members in the 16-state region SREB serves outside historically Black colleges and universities, spokesman Alan Richard said.

Currently, about 5 percent of professors at public four-year colleges in the United States are Black, 3 percent Hispanic and less than 1 percent American Indian – despite the fact that almost a third of the nation's college students are minorities.

"Our program was created to encourage changing that for the better," Richard said. "It's valuable that our teaching workforce have similar experiences to the students."

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