

Article 19

Multiple Pathways to Enhancing Retention and Success of Students of Color

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The purpose of this article is to suggest methods and collaborations to help ethnically diverse college students increase their likelihood for success in higher education. The incorporation of academic advising, counseling, and mentoring into the lives of students of color may help them achieve their full potential and develop their professional identities.

Academic Advising

The role of advising in students' lives depends to a large extent on the cultural and ethnic background of the students. Many colleges and universities in the U.S. were established with White, middle or upper class students in mind. Despite changes over time, racial diversity has not been characteristic of many institutions. For this reason and others, the experiences of ethnically diverse students differ significantly from experiences of majority students. Some students of color may experience "feelings of isolation, alienation, and incompatibility, as well as a perceived (or in many cases, experienced), hostility from others" when arriving on college campuses (Gilbert, 2003).

The flawed assumption that all students are similar may be detrimental to students of color. Berkel and Constantine (2005) cautioned advisers against assuming all college students benefit from the development of individuation and independence. In reality, emphasis on autonomy may alienate a student from his or her family and support network. While this belief may be accurate for some students, the maintenance and development of strong, positive relationships with others is critical to academic success for many ethnically diverse students (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Constantine and Gainor (2004) found that African American and Asian American college women rely on close family members and friends to provide support and encouragement. These findings are important considerations for advisers who work with African American and Asian American college women, and are

a reminder to advisers to avoid generalizations about students' needs. According to Brown (2005), "Treating everyone the same may be equal treatment but it may not be equitable treatment."

For this reason, it is crucial that advisers be culturally competent and genuinely caring. Gilbert (2003) suggested that advisers cultivate trust through authentic sincerity and affability, moving beyond a purely impersonal professionalism to a more personal touch. Personal touches that relate the advisers' knowledge of and interest in other cultures send positive messages to students.

Yarbrough (2002) suggested the Engagement Model for Academic Advising, allowing "students and advisers to develop a heightened personal investment in the success of the individual academic program, the supporting academic unit, and the overall university" (p. 61). Student and adviser enjoy mutually rewarding relationships, and share responsibility for the relationship.

While this model may be effective for students who have already adjusted to the institution, some ethnically and culturally diverse college students do not have the knowledge or skills to seek support services. Consequently they may not avail themselves of support and may decrease their chances for satisfaction and success. For this reason, many researchers support the Intrusive Advising model (Cruise, 2002; Holmes, 2005), which suggests that because some students will not take initiative in resolving academic issues, intrusive and proactive advisers will increase culturally diverse students' chances for successful resolution of problems (Holmes, 2005). According to its proponents, Intrusive Advising is effective for several reasons. Students who know that an academic adviser will contact them are more motivated to study, and regular contact helps alleviate stress. Further, intrusive advising insures that students receive referrals for needed services, and have the assurance that they matter to someone within the institution (Backhus, 1989).

Counseling

A primary responsibility of college counseling centers is providing individual and/or group counseling to students experiencing distress in educational, interpersonal, or career domains (Boyd et al., 2003). Students of color who utilize counseling services frequently cite relationship issues, depression, academic concerns, and stress (Constantine, Chen, & Ceesay, 1997; Davidson, Yakushka, & Sanford-Martens, 2004).

One analysis of ethnically diverse students' usage patterns of counseling services indicated that students underutilized counseling (Davidson et al., 2004). In a survey of students of color who opted not to utilize counseling services, Atkinson, Jennings, and Liongson (1990) found that students believed the availability of counselors who respect and value diversity would improve services. Constantine (2002) found that students placed great value on multicultural competence in assessing their satisfaction with counseling services.

Reynolds and Pope (2003) provided a framework for competence in multicultural counseling which is also relevant for academic advising:

1. *Counseling.* Counselors develop awareness, knowledge, and skills to work with diverse groups. This includes awareness of other cultural groups and awareness of how one's values, attitudes, and beliefs impact the counseling process.
2. *Outreach and consultation.* In collaboration with ethnically diverse student groups, counselors infuse cultural content and diversity into campus programming.
3. *Teaching, training, and supervision.* Counselors who are trained in multicultural supervision techniques provide opportunities for supervisees to explore their constructions of race, racial identity, and personal biases. Counselors who are not trained in multicultural supervision techniques should be afforded professional development opportunities to gain the requisite skills.
4. *Testing and assessment.* Counselors use culturally appropriate tests and must be aware of the literature regarding areas of cultural bias in assessment. Client assessment includes opportunities to gain awareness of the client's worldview and an understanding of the client as an individual within a cultural context.
5. *Multicultural organization development, advocacy, and activism.* Counselors assess barriers within the institution and within the counseling center, advocate for diverse

groups, and use strategic planning to develop multicultural counseling centers.

Flores and Heppner (2002) recommended several elements of culturally competent career counseling. In addition to the themes previously identified, they cited concerns specific to career counseling:

- knowledge of the demographics of people of color in the labor force and higher education;
- awareness of how people of color experience and understand the world of work;
- knowledge and application of multicultural counseling theory, culturally relevant career counseling approaches, assessment techniques, and career development models; and
- creation of career centers that are welcoming to diverse populations.

Research within student affairs has explored ways to enhance services to ethnically diverse students. Davidson et al. (2004) suggested that low utilization of counseling center services among diverse populations could indicate their needs are not being addressed. A real or perceived lack of knowledge of diverse worldviews among counselors may explain some variation in utilization. Students and faculty in graduate student development programs self-reported limited knowledge of diverse populations (McEwen & Roper, 1994; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997).

Pope and Reynolds (1997) believed integration of multicultural competencies into the core mission of student development most effectively serves culturally diverse populations. The authors defined multicultural competence as possession of requisite knowledge, skills, and awareness to work with diverse student populations. Enhancement of multicultural competence through diversity training has been proposed in college counseling departments, student affairs, and career counseling, and in graduate programs in student development (Atkinson et al., 1990; Constantine, 2002; Flores & Heppner, 2002; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997).

Choi-Pearson, Castillo, and Maples (2004) found that diversity training effectively reduced levels of racial prejudice in student affairs practitioners. They contended that diversity training must be ongoing, and found the level of racial prejudice decreased as the number of diversity training experiences increased. Several authors have advocated training and educational opportunities that include exploration of White cultural awareness and racial identity, suggesting that as one's awareness of what it means to be White increases, levels

of racism decrease and competence in multicultural contexts increase (Choi-Pearson et al., 2004; Mueller & Pope, 2001, 2003; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1992; Utsey & Gernat, 2002).

Mentoring

As mentioned previously, there are many advising and counseling models within educational institutions (Gregory, 2002; Reynolds & Pope, 2003). In some higher education institutions, advising and counseling are often provided by the Division of Student Development under the auspices of the Vice President for Student Development. In other configurations advisement is relegated to academic faculty. Advisers may be professionally educated or may assume tasks associated with advising as ancillary responsibilities to their academic assignments.

Mentoring, however, is a unique relationship most often between college students and academic faculty. While college student development graduate programs prepare advisers and counselors, none of them train mentors. This is understandable given that the mentor/mentee relationship is deeply personal and professional, and seldom grows from a formal connection.

According to Maples, Dupey, and LeBeauf (2004), effective mentors must be

- truly interested in students, first as human beings, second as students;
- expect only intrinsic rewards not quantified by salary or merit awards; and
- consider accountability to students to be of utmost importance.

In addition to these qualities, culturally competent mentors must also embrace a nonassumptive stance that requires ridding oneself of preconceived biases and stereotypes. Specialized training or preparation in self-awareness may be necessary to achieve this level of competence. Mentors must readily acknowledge the variety and scope of diversity issues and their impact on the mentoring relationship. Even within the same ethnic or cultural heritage there are environment, social, economic, and experience differences. Mentors must also possess a recognition and avoidance of transference/counter transference with students. While role modeling is of inestimable value within the mentoring relationship, mentors must be mindful of potential "cloning."

According to Reith (2005), an essential component of effective mentoring is an empathic connection between mentor and mentee. "It is difficult, if not impossible, to access that essential connection without understanding how the mentees cultural

experiences have influenced his or her communication styles and life choices" (p. 321).

Maples et al. (2004) viewed a culturally competent mentor as

1. possessing humility and being approachable;
2. being empathic and committed to empowering the mentee;
3. having the knowledge and ability to communicate with the mentee on effects of socioracial identity development, age, gender, religion, and cultural context on the mentee's development;
4. possessing compassion, commitment, and caring to be able to support and challenge the mentee without causing alienation; and
5. maintaining professional connection and relationships with a variety of ethnic and cultural minorities.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Strauss (2004) noted that today's children born between 1982 and 2002, dubbed the millennials, have grown up in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society where barriers of race tend to be disappearing. According to the 2002 U.S. Census Bureau, 37.6% of millennials are non-White. Our increasingly richly diverse society provides an impetus for higher education to address the academic advising, counseling, and mentoring of ethnically diverse students as a mandate to college and university professionals.

According to the Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project, an intentional focus on institutional improvement is an important element that characterizes institutions that excel in student retention and success. DEEP, a 2-year project of twenty 4-year colleges and universities, examined the characteristics of the institutions that may be contributing to their success. Coordinators of the project, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005), cited "a can-do ethic that permeates the campuses – a tapestry of values and beliefs that reflect the institutions' willingness to take on matters of substance consistent with their priorities" (p. 42).

Kuh et al. (2005) noted a positive restlessness present on all 20 campuses, characterized by administrators and faculty who are constantly seeking to improve their institutions. The schools share common philosophies of investment in student success, including the investment of resources, and the inclusion of student input in innovative programs.

Tinto (1993) conceptualized retention as an interactional process between student and institutional characteristics. When students do not mesh with the

institutional characteristics, including faculty, they often experience isolation, have difficulty connecting to the institution, and are more likely to withdraw.

Interaction is the crucial element. According to Maples et al. (2004), higher education must commit to multicultural education in all of its expectations and manifestations. It appears that collaborative approaches to academic advising, counseling, and mentoring will benefit students and enhance their personal and professional development.

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