

UW DIVERSITY OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Admissions and Outreach Coordinators 2000-2001

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INTRODUCTION

In response to Initiative 200, which eliminates racial preference as a basis for admission selection, University of Washington (UW) President Richard L. McCormick in January 1999 established the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity to envision and support programs that would continue the university's dedication to a diverse campus culture. The UW has since created a variety of programs intended to increase the cultural diversity of the UW student body. One project initiated this academic year is the Admissions and Outreach Coordinator Project, which places UW outreach and recruitment counselors in two underserved areas of Washington state.

Under the direction of the Office of Minority Affairs and the Office of Admissions, the Admissions and Outreach Coordinator Project intends to serve and support minority students in schools districts in Eastern Washington areas in the vicinity of Wenatchee and the Yakima Valley. The UW Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) is currently evaluating the outcomes of the Admission and Outreach Coordinator Project, providing information and suggesting directions for project improvement.

METHODOLOGY

In the first year of the project, one Admissions and Outreach Coordinator was hired in October 2000 to provide services to minority students in the Yakima Valley of Washington state. A second Coordinator was hired in March 2001 and assigned to school districts in the central Washington region. Since the Coordinators are in the initial stages of program development, it was suggested by Enrique Morales of the Office of Minority Affairs that qualitative methods be used to shadow the Coordinators as they begin their service to schools.

Each Coordinator was interviewed separately and asked questions concerning his philosophy of outreach and recruitment, plans for establishing contact with school districts and minority families in the communities, and ideas for future projects. Following the initial interview, contact was maintained through email, and for one Coordinator a second personal interview took place when he was on campus for further training. Notes were taken during each interview session and email correspondence was saved as documentation. All qualitative data were reviewed in constant comparative analysis. Categories of interest were established and used for further comparisons.

FINDINGS

This report presents overall themes from the evaluation and is a tool for feedback for the UW supervisor of the Coordinators.

Outreach and Recruitment Plans

Each Coordinator brings with him an extensive background in education and in minority cultures. From Latino heritages, their first-hand knowledge of cultural communities in their areas provides advantages for both Coordinators as they begin their work. One Coordinator was previously an At-Risk Counselor at the Northwest Community Action Center in the Yakima Valley, and the other was a recruiter for a competing university in Eastern Washington. Both Coordinators have college degrees in Education, which seems to be essential for understanding school cultures. Since these are newly established positions, each Coordinator is not yet fully aware of the impact he might have in his assigned area.

At the beginning of their position as a UW Admissions and Outreach Coordinator, both men were a bit uncertain as to what they would or should do. One Coordinator reported that he used "trial and error at the beginning" to find out what would work and would be most effective as outreach tools. Since the second Coordinator had previous experience at another university, he was more confident of how to recruit minority students, but needed to establish contact and rapport with personnel in each new school district. He felt that "schools must want me there" in order to be most effective.

Technical problems plagued both Coordinators from the start. Because they were living at considerable distances from the UW, internet access, communicating with supervisors on campus and obtaining current student information have proved to be obstacles. One Coordinator emailed a month after he was hired that "I can finally check my UW email, but I do it through my hotmail account. I still have not successfully dialed into the UW server. I feel like I have spent too much time messing with my computer without results." Computer solutions required that this Coordinator actually bring his computer to the UW for troubleshooting, thus one month into his position he felt he "finally had the computer problem solved." Access to the UW system is critical so the Coordinators can track students they have contacted.

The other Coordinator had such a large area to navigate, he found that it was hard for minority students, faculty in schools, and families in the community to contact him. After his initial interview, the OEA suggested to his supervisor that a cellular phone would eliminate this problem. The phone was ordered and has in fact been a valuable tool. Email contact has been the most prominent communication method for the Coordinators, and they report that they send their supervisor weekly reports on their activities and progress.

Both Coordinators have a variety of activities in mind for outreach and recruitment, but report that they have not established a set schedule of school visitations yet. Most of their time is used to establish contacts that they feel should serve them well in the future. One aim is to "create an awareness of the UW presence and availability to provide assistance to minority students and their families." Coordinators report that personnel in schools are commenting, "We never had anyone contact us before." Each Coordinator is to make initial contacts with school districts, provide information on outreach and recruitment activities, and plan for future activities.

Time seems to be a big factor as “there is never enough.” Neither Coordinator is sure what his limit is or how far he can stretch. This first year is a “we’ll see” year for them. Each Coordinator asks, “What is the best use of my time?” One Coordinator has “Priority One schools and Priority Two schools” and plans his outreach efforts accordingly. Besides visiting schools during regular hours, Coordinators suggested such outreach activities as home visits, radio station programming, college and career nights at schools, news releases in local papers, bringing students to the UW campus for tours and activities, and working with after-school groups. One Coordinator is a Latino dancer and musician and has approached an after-school club to ask if he could join them in their practices. He also plans to bring these students to the UW so they can meet and practice with the Latino UW dancers. The Coordinators do not lack ideas for outreach to students in their areas.

The potential for impact is a reality to both Coordinators. One Coordinator stated that he “can get all the applicants to the UW that we want, but many students may not fit the criteria for selection.” Minority students are not aware of UW admissions criteria, of how the Admissions Index works, and of how competitive UW admittance is. “Of some 70 students in one community who wanted to apply for admission, only four met the admission criteria.” Many students have grade-point averages of 2.2, much below the standard for admission, so the Coordinators report that they suggest students go to local community colleges and then transfer to the UW when they are more prepared. Becoming fully informed about the transfer process is a goal of one of the Coordinators, since he is unfamiliar with the paperwork required.

Each Coordinator’s personal heritage allows him to articulate clearly the cultural factors that influence outreach and recruitment efforts. Many Latino students are the first generation in their family to consider attending college. One Coordinator feels “home visits are essential” to recruitment. His first visit to a home is simply to “establish rapport” and leave information. Later he plans to talk about educational opportunities. He also know that the father is critical in Latino families, and often does not want his daughter to leave home. He would like to include some female assistance in his home visitations, so “it is not just a male talking to the father, but a female talking to the mother and the daughter.” For these families, money is critical and not often are there extra funds to attend college. Financial aid seems to be a significant factor in recruitment.

Needs of Coordinators and Suggestions for Supervisors

Because Coordinators are not often on campus so they can interact with their supervisor and gather information, the Coordinators desire communication. One Coordinator mentioned that he sends the supervisor weekly reports of his activities and includes a section at the end of each report called “Concerns.” He stated that he has not received any feedback on his concerns and it took his own initiative and appeared on the UW campus to get his questions answered and concerns resolved. In order for Coordinators to be most effective, the UW supervisor needs to maintain contact, to establish routines for communication, and to immediately act on problem situations as they arise.

Neither Coordinator is sure how he will be judged in his role. They know that increasing the numbers of minority students applying for admission to the UW is their priority, but they do not have a vision for what that imaginary number might be. One Coordinator is not really sure what his job description is. How will success be judged for the Coordinators and how does that relate to their job description? Conversations need to take place so everyone is clear about the goals and outcomes expected for this project.