

UW DIVERSITY OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

EMPOWER¹ 1999-2001

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INTRODUCTION

Envisioned by the Minority Think Tank, a group of University of Washington (UW) undergraduate students, the EMPOWER project is designed for high school seniors as a tool to express their perceptions of social justice, to reflect on the perceptions of others, and to prepare for their transition to college. One of many programs funded by the Central Administration in response to Initiative 200, EMPOWER is a student-sponsored and student-operated project.

In response to Initiative 200, which eliminated racial preference as a basis for admission selection, UW President Richard L. McCormick established in January 1999 the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity to support programs that would continue the University's dedication to a diverse campus culture. The UW Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) is currently evaluating the outcomes of these projects and reporting on progress made.

METHODOLOGY

The creator and visionary of EMPOWER, Tyson Marsh, a senior majoring in political science, was interviewed about establishment of the project and procurement of funding. This report notes the highlights of the conversation as a perspective on a grassroots effort.

FINDINGS

As the project assignment for an undergraduate class on ethnic studies at the UW, two students conceptualized the Student Ambassador project and EMPOWER to satisfy class requirements. Not able to let go of their ideas, they presented them to the UW Board of Regents and funding was approved by the UW administration for both projects. With respect to EMPOWER, Marsh personally took applications to nearby Seattle high schools to inform students of the project and encourage them to apply. EMPOWER received \$10,000 for its first year and in 1999 seven high school students participated in the program.

Each quarter, EMPOWER curriculum addresses aspects of multicultural understandings and Marsh holds meetings every other Saturday at the UW. In the fall quarter, students bridge the gap from high school to college by touring the UW campus, meeting influential people on campus, and attending UW conferences. A representative from the Office of Minority Affairs presents criteria for a solid UW application for admission. The winter quarter is academic in scope and built on a multicultural theme.

¹ Encouraging Minority People to Overcome with Education and Respect

Students read speeches on race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion and have dialogues to explore topics. Discussions revolve around critical topics in students' communities, and as a result a dialogue was established with UW police on racial profiling. In poetry sessions, students express their thoughts and feelings. In spring quarter, students take what they have learned and put it into action. Spring quarter 2001, EMPOWER students decided to host a *Poetry Slam* on the topic of social justice.

EMPOWER outcomes for students include achieving higher grades in their high school classes, learning to question and think, and establishing the desire to attend the UW. Marsh believes that this project is a true reflection of the UW commitment to diversity. He has not had one student "turn away" from the UW yet, and this year seventeen of the EMPOWER students have applied and have been accepted for admission to the UW for 2001-2002. The project is intended to develop leaders prepared for the UW experience who can address problems and encourage true multiculturalism.