

## **UW DIVERSITY OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT**

### **Community Outreach 1999-2001**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

In response to Initiative 200, University of Washington (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. One project, a joint venture of the UW Offices of Minority Affairs and Admissions, provides community outreach to promote positive community relationships and establishes a director for the project.

The UW Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) has been contracted to evaluate outreach efforts, to provide information and to suggest directions for project improvement.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

In March 2001, an initial conversation was held with the Assistant Director of Admissions for Student Outreach and Community Relations to gather information on activities and create a list of possible contacts for interviews. At that time, three contacts were established and a joint letter requesting an interview was drafted. Letters were sent to the contacts and in the next week telephone calls were made to set interview dates. All interviews were held at the convenience of the participants and in their respective work settings. Participants were informed of the process of the evaluation and of the report that would be written. Interview questions included:

- 1) How did your relationship with the UW community begin? Describe the programs with which you have been personally involved. Who is your main contact at the UW?
- 2) What is your perception of the UW image in the community? Is that a perception that you feel most members of your community would also hold? What approaches can we engage to clarify misperceptions?
- 3) What role do you think community members should play in UW outreach efforts? What ideas do you have for new outreach programs or to improve the programs we already have?

Immediately after each interview, notes were reviewed and clarified. Reflections on the interview were also written. Examination of the qualitative data included inductive analysis to find common categories of responses. Results are reported collectively and are summarized in the conclusion.

## **FINDINGS**

Each community contact had a unique perspective on UW community outreach activities and was open to questions during the interview. Main response themes are: 1) Historical and Cultural Perspectives, 2) Community Perceptions of the UW, and 3) Partnership Ideas.

### **Historical and Cultural Perspectives**

Most of the participants agreed that historical and cultural perspectives influence recruitment. Minority student families and community members are influential in the process when students consider a college education. For African American families, parents were reported as less involved with older students, and peers seemed to exert more influence upon where African American students attend college. For African American males, the statement was made that “you have to keep them busy or they get into trouble,” and might not be able to attend college. It was revealed that Latino families want their sons to go to college, but not their daughters, and especially not to the “corrupt city of Seattle.”

Participants generally felt that parents were uninformed about college entrance requirements. Parents need to know what their children have to do to meet the criteria for admission. Parents do not understand that there are core courses that need to be taken in high school. Transfer agreement policies of community colleges seem to be a good option for many minority students, but parents lack knowledge of the process. One participant felt that academic criteria like GPA and test scores are not good predictors of college achievement, and supported this statement by reporting that “many students who were not predicted to do well finished college and became professionals.”

One suggestion to change these perceptions was to profile minority professors on campus. If they are involved in community outreach, students could see themselves reflected in that image and might possibly view themselves as able to succeed in higher education.

### **Community Perceptions of the UW**

Probably the most powerful responses from participants concerned the community perceptions of the UW. Responses included:

The UW is like a million miles away, a thousand miles apart spiritually.

The UW is unreachable, unfriendly, students get lost there.

The UW is not seen as a diverse school.

There is a mystique about college.

The UW should be an option, but it isn't one.

There isn't a negative perception about the UW, there just isn't one.

For minority community members, Initiative 200 is seen as more than a problem, it is a “devastating reality.”

### **Partnership Ideas**

All participants had ideas for outreach partnerships with their community. They said “there is no shortcut” to recruiting minority students. Most often they felt it was a “college problem” and suggested that the UW “should invest money in outreach partnerships.” The “college needs to come to the community” and we

want to “see more from the UW” the “flow must be back and forth.” “Alumni involvement” was suggested as a way that might make a difference.

They felt that partnerships could be built between the UW and their community, but “no one ever came to us before,” they responded. “It takes a Latino to recruit a Latino,” stated one participant, suggesting that an African American recruiter would probably not be effective for Latino students. It was suggested that the UW needs to find out who community members trust, who opens the doors, and then build on that relationship. “In the Latino community it takes a long time to trust.”

One participant recommended that UW colleges plan field experiences in minority communities. Psychology, education, and social work field experiences could start programs in minority communities and sustain them with volunteers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Community members were very willing to be interviewed and seemed to be quite open in their comments. They provided information on minority and community perspectives of the UW and the historical and cultural influences that affect perceptions. All participants offered suggestions that could be implemented, but the key is that there needs to be activity coming from the UW into the community. They want to see the UW commitment in action.

While the evaluation of the UW community outreach revealed many helpful insights and suggestions, it also revealed that there is much more to be done. The supporting evidence for this conclusion is that only one participant out of the three who were interviewed seemed to know the Assistant Director of Admissions for Student Outreach and Community Relations even though the position was created over a year ago.