

STATE OF COLORADO

Department of Higher Education
COLORADO COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Bill Owens
Governor

Richard F. O'Donnell
Executive Director

Report of the Colorado Minority Success Taskforce

January 31, 2006

Prepared by the
Colorado Commission on Higher Education

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Richard F. O'Donnell, Executive Director, Colorado Commission on Higher Education

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Meeting Schedule

August 31st at the Lowry Education Center – Presentations from National Experts on Minority Retention and Graduation

September 19th at the Auraria Education Center – Presentations from the Community College of Denver, Red Rocks Community College, Arapahoe Community College, the Community College of Aurora, Metropolitan State College of Denver and the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center

October 3rd at Colorado State University – Pueblo – Presentations from Pueblo Community College, Pikes Peak Community College, Trinidad State Junior College, Lamar Community College, University of Colorado – Colorado Springs, Adams State College and Colorado State University – Pueblo.

October 19th at Colorado State University - Fort Collins – Presentations from Front Range Community College, Aims Community College, the University of Northern Colorado and Colorado State University – Fort Collins

November 3rd at the University of Colorado, Boulder – Presentations from the Colorado School of Mines and the University of Colorado – Boulder



January 31, 2006

Over the past several months, several alleged racial incidents have occurred on different campuses within Colorado that are of great concern to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and the Colorado General Assembly.

In May 2005, the Commission on Higher Education received a request by several members of the General Assembly to “look into the atmosphere on our campuses for students of color and what impact this may have on the ability to recruit, retain and graduate students.” This request asked that we report back to those members our findings and recommendations to “improve the climate on our campuses for all students.”

The Commission, in conjunction with several of the legislators who made the request, formed the Colorado Minority Success Taskforce and held a series of meetings, commencing in August of 2005.

The taskforce heard from several renowned national experts concerning the recruitment, retention and graduation of minority and low-income students. These experts presented a number of recommendations to the taskforce for ways to improve the climate on Colorado’s campus to ensure that all students, no matter their background, have the opportunity to succeed in the educational goals.

This report describes the best practices described by national experts, some of the actions that are currently being taken by Colorado institutions of higher education and the taskforce’s recommendations for improving programs to retain and graduate minority and low-income students.

Sincerely,

Rep. K. Jerry Frangas
Co-Chair

Richard F. O’Donnell
Co-Chair

National Research Findings

In August 2005, the taskforce heard three separate presentations by nationally renowned experts on minority student success. The taskforce heard from Dr. Vincent Tinto, a distinguished university professor and Chair, Higher Education Program, School of Education at Syracuse University; Dr. Alberto F. Cabrera, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Wisconsin; and, Dr. Watson Scott Swail, President of the Educational Policy Institute.

Preparation continues to play a major role in the success of minority and low-income students. The degree to which a student arrives in higher education academically prepared to succeed in college impacts their ability to be successful at the collegiate level. The taskforce did not specifically address ways in which the K-12 system could improve the preparedness of students, but certainly recognizes the importance of minority students receiving a quality, rigorous college preparation curriculum in high school. The focus of the taskforce, and the national experts, was to suggest ways in which higher education can improve its performance in meeting the unique needs of minority students.

The national experts that presented their findings highlight five general areas that their research shows to be of major importance. These areas are: leadership and commitment, the first year, engagement, support and belonging. The following are the questions that were raised regarding these issues.

Leadership and Commitment

It is critical that there is a clearly articulated commitment to wanting minority students to stay and succeed. This commitment must be fully engaged and accompanied by ability to act by each and every level of the collegiate body from the governing board and president to individual faculty members. Among the questions they suggest each institution ask and answer are:

- What is the governing board's position on minority success? What leadership role is the CEO taking? Does faculty address this issue? Does the institution have an action plan in place to boost minority retention, graduation and success?
- Who is accountable for student success? Who decides? Who assesses?
- Does the institution measure why students leave?
- How are financial aid dollars allocated? What percent go to all minority students? What percent go to low-income minority students? How effective are various types of financial aid at retaining students? How do you know? What types of analyses are performed? What about unmet need?
- Does the institution engage in outreach to K-12 feeder schools? If so, what is that outreach?

- What are the institution's goals regarding minority success? Who decides indicators and monitors progress?
- How is the institution preparing for the tidal wave of minority high school graduates that will impact institutions in 2010 and on? What are you doing *now* to prepare for the changing demographics of the state's K-12 system? Has the institution even discussed these issues yet?
- How many faculty are minorities? Is increasing this ratio an institutional priority? If so, who assumes responsibility for this? Is it based on a roll of the dice? Is the institution trying to "grow its own" faculty of color?

The First Year Matters

Nearly 50% of college dropouts leave before the start of the second year and another 40% leave during the second year because of what did or did not happen during the first year.

- Does the institution explicitly involve parents, spouses and children in orientation programs and discuss how they can help ensure a student's success? Whose responsibility is it to communicate with the family members? Who makes that decision?
- Does the institution assess the *individual* cognitive abilities *and* social abilities a student brings to campus to determine what academic or social supports, if any, they may require for success?
- Does the institution have an early warning system to see if a student is struggling academically or socially? After a warning is diagnosed, is there follow-through to ensure the student receives the academic or social support needed?
- Does the institution offer structured first-year programs to assist academically or socially weaker students with a focused, supportive environment?

Engagement is Critical

Students need to be engaged on campus in a way that values and honors their presence and involvement. If they are isolated and disengaged from the campus culture there is a much greater risk of dropping out.

- Is there a strategy to use Work Study so financial aid is used to help students become engaged in campus activities? What percentage of minority students get Work Study; is it given a preference over grants or loans?

- How is faculty involved in student engagement? Is there professional development for faculty around student engagement? Is there a requirement that faculty, as part of their service obligations, specifically work with minority student engagement in the classroom, lab and studio?
- How are faculty held accountable for student success? Who monitors faculty involvement? How does student success factor into tenure and promotion? Are faculty members taught to identify signs of a student that is at risk for departing?

Effective Support

Access without support is not opportunity, but support must be aligned and connected to the everyday learning needs of students to be effective. Students must make an immediate connection between learning in the course and academic support or they will not value the support.

- What academic supports are offered? What is the per capita (student) investment in support services? What is the investment per student in need? Is it possible that a student could be turned away, or have to wait more than 48 hours to receive services?
- How does the institution ensure that supplemental education and developmental learning groups are aligned and connected with a student's regular coursework?
- How are support programs publicized? Do support programs find students, or visa versa?

A Sense of Belonging

Students need to have a shared sense of community values but not be isolated and disengaged from the wider culture.

- What programs, housing or other opportunities for community building exist for minority students? Are complaints monitored? How successful are the housing arrangements? Are roommate matches random or planned? Who makes the decision?
- How does the campus ensure these programs do not become isolated from the wider campus?
- Do students in developmental learning communities have any courses that are in the mainstream? Who counsels students in need of developmental learning?
- Who tracks these students' progress? Who is accountable for their success?

- What role models are available on campus for minority students? Who are these role models? Is it explicit on the part of the role model to serve minority students?

Colorado Findings

Over the course of the taskforce's meetings, it became clear that Colorado's institutions are all working in different ways to answer many of the questions addressed by the national experts. Unfortunately, these efforts are implemented unevenly and not all institutions utilize some of the most important methods to assist minority students.

Each of the institutions that presented to the taskforce had programs and policies in place to address the needs of minority and low-income students. There were some programs, like the federally funded TRIO program, present on almost every campus. There are others programs utilizing academic alerts and mentoring that are not present on each campus. Several institutions presented the taskforce with information about programs that are particularly successful on their campus.

For example, at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, enrollment for students of color has increased by 130% in the past decade. One of the ways UCCS was able to increase minority enrollment was to target institutional scholarships, state aid, work-study and need based aid to minority students.

Every institution has a cultural center, student club or organization related to diversity. At the University of Northern Colorado, there are 16 different cultural celebrations that attract more than 7,500 attendees each year. UNC also has 26 clubs or organizations related specifically to cultural diversity. However, it is unclear whether these programs are successful.

At Colorado State University, new freshman students are presented the option of participating in the "Taking Stock" program; 60-70% of students elect to do so. Students then complete a self-assessment in the 5th week of their first semester, which is used by CSU to provide guidance and support and to refer students to appropriate support services.

Task Force Recommendations

All institutions have programs or policies against discrimination and designed to assist low income and minority students. The taskforce found, however, that what is largely absent is a systematic approach that coordinates alignment of federal, state and local resources to focus those limited resources on ensuring minority student success. Under Colorado's new College Opportunity Fund program, Colorado's institutions of higher education have the opportunity to focus their limited resources on meaningful programs to assist low-income and minority students. To meet this end, institutions must develop long-term plans to address these issues and prioritize funding to attend to the needs of low-income and minority students.

The taskforce makes the following recommendations as important first steps toward a long-term, systemic approach to ensuring minority student success.

1. Amend Performance Contract Provisions to Require Best Practices.

CRS 23-5-129 directs CCHE to enter into performance contracts with institutions participating in the College Opportunity Fund. These contracts must include provisions to improve access to higher education, quality and success in higher education, efficiency of operations and the needs of the state.

The legislature should adopt language to require CCHE to measure institutional performance in achieving the research-based best practices for minority student success. Specifically, CCHE should be required in performance contracts to measure performance on leadership and commitment, the first year, engagement, support and belonging for minority students.

2. Amend Fee-for-Service Contracts to Fund Research-Based Support Services.

CRS 23-5-130 lists the services that the Department of Higher Education may contract with institutions of higher education to provide. Currently, the Department contracts with institutions for educational services in rural communities; educational services required by the Commission to meet its obligations under reciprocal agreements, specialized educational services and professional degrees (graduate and other specialized degrees).

In order for the state to show its commitment to increase the success of underserved students, the legislature should adopt language to allow the Department to contract with the institutions to provide proven, research-based support services for underserved students. These should include, but not be limited to, implementing individual cognitive and social diagnostics of all at-risk incoming students, early warning systems and faculty mentoring programs for underserved students.

3. Amend Performance Contract Provisions to Include Specific Support Services.

CRS 23-5-129 directs CCHE to enter into performance contracts with institutions participating in the College Opportunity Fund. These contracts must include provisions to improve access to higher education, quality and success in higher education, efficiency of operations and the needs of the state.

The legislature should adopt language to require CCHE to measure the performance of each institution in providing individual cognitive and social diagnostics of incoming students, early warning systems and faculty mentoring programs.

3. Prioritize Work Study Within Financial Aid.

One consistent theme throughout the presentations to the taskforce was the success of work-study participants. Overall, work-study students are retained and graduated at a much higher rate than those students simply awarded financial aid. The reason is that

students who work on campus tend to be more engaged in campus life and develop stronger support structures – both critical for minority student success.

CCHE should adopt a policy to require institutions to prioritize the use of financial aid awards to work study participants.

4. Online Textbook Pilot Program to Reduce Book Costs

As the costs of textbooks continues to rise, the hardest hit tend to be underserved students. Task Force members consistently heard that the cost of textbooks and course books were a great concern to low-income students whose ability to pay these increase costs is limited

Currently, some private higher education institutions have developed effective methods to reduce the costs of textbooks and course books for their students. Specifically, these institutions have created on-line course book libraries to allow for the purchase of only those materials needed for the coursework. The institutions have negotiated with publishers to by chapter, rather than requiring the purchase of the entire textbook. These programs are relatively new and, therefore, not widely available. Since it is not clear how such a program may work at the state level, the legislature should provide, via fee-for-service funding, the ability for several interested institutions to participate in a pilot project to bring online textbook libraries to campuses to determine the book costs reductions for students.

<p>For more information on the presentations made to the taskforce by national experts and by Colorado's institutions of higher education, please visit our website at www.state.co.us/cche</p>
