

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

As part of the monitoring commitments of the Partnership Agreement, representatives from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Committee on Equal Opportunities (CEO) visited Murray State University (Murray State) on April 19, 2000. The goal of the joint visit was to gather information concerning issues detailed in the Partnership Agreement, specifically the recruitment and retention of African American students, the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff members and campus climate. The visit was conducted similarly to the visits previously conducted by the CEO. The visit included discussions with different constituencies of the University community. Based on the responses of the participants, we note the following:

Recruitment and Retention of Students

Strengths

- ◆ The Office of Student Relations coordinates all undergraduate student recruitment. The Associate Director of that office coordinates the University's efforts for minority recruitment, including visits to high schools, community colleges and outreach efforts to area churches and community organizations.
- ◆ An essential component of the University's recruitment efforts is the ROADS Scholars Program. This program, instituted in 1994, requires teams of administrators, faculty, and staff to visit schools in the University's recruitment area. Each team visits its respective school and develops professional relationships with the high school faculty and will frequently teach a class. Currently, there are over 300 faculty and staff members participating in the ROADS Scholars program.
- ◆ The University recently established an African American Resource Team as part of the ROADS Scholars Program. The Resource Team consists of faculty and professional staff who assist area schools and communities in multicultural programming efforts.
- ◆ The University's minority recruitment efforts also include initiatives at the middle and high school levels. For example, the University sponsors on-campus programs such as the African American Heritage Scholars Bowl, the Honors Day Program for Distinguished Black High School Students, the Black Student Leadership Conference, and the Whitney Young Scholars Summer Institute, all of which expose high school students to the campus and provide opportunities for students to compete for scholarships. The University also sponsors, in conjunction with local churches, a Youth Enrichment Program for students in grades 3 to 12.
- ◆ The University maintains an Enrollment Management Team that meets regularly with the University President, Provost, and Vice President of Student Affairs to discuss recruitment strategies and goals, including African American enrollment. The

Enrollment Management Team used an Enrollment Management Action System (EMAS) database that contains a list of the University's student body. The EMAS allows the Enrollment Management Team to track at-risk students.

- ◆ The University provides Campus mentoring such as Project S.U.C.C.E.S.S. The Project S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Program involves a one-day retreat for students composed of teambuilding and bonding exercises. Each student is also assigned an upperclassman who serves as a peer advocate/mentor. Students are expected to attend at least five programs offered throughout a semester, which include topics such as time management skills, study skills, and tips for meeting with professors. The program is now in its fourth year of operation.
- ◆ The Minority Student Support Services Office has programs throughout the year to assist students and encourage future success. The office provides recognition to students who have earned a grade point average of 3.0 or better. In addition, the Minority Student Support Services Office also contacts students at mid-term who have a GPA of 2.0 or below to discuss strategies for improvement. The office also provides informal tutoring services.
- ◆ The Director of the Minority Student Support Services Office maintains frequent contact with faculty members regarding "at risk" students. The Director will intervene and attempt to assist students having trouble.
- ◆ Representatives of the University indicated that the recent adoption of a residential college design, whereby students belong to smaller college units within the University, assists in retaining both white and African American students by engendering a sense of community. The residential college design also allows the University to track the progress of students more easily.
- ◆ The University has several programs in place to address graduate student recruitment, including "growing your own" (graduate assistantships), attending college fairs that target African American students considering graduate school and the Kentucky Department of Education's School Administrators Program.

Concerns

- ◆ Recently the Office of Minority Recruitment was merged with the Office of School Relations. The University stated that the change was completed to provide a more coordinated recruitment effort and to provide more resources for minority student recruitment. The merger, however, gives the appearance of a diminished role and diminished importance for minority student recruitment.
- ◆ There is a lack of resources for minority recruitment. The University has numerous recruitment strategies in place but primary responsibility for the implementation and oversight of these efforts is shouldered by the Associate Director of the Office of

School Relations. Although greater resources are now available, they did not seem sufficient to meet the University's needs.

Recruitment and Retention of African American faculty and staff

Strengths

- ◆ The University's Equity Office is directly involved with all faculty and staff searches. The Office reviews position advertisements, the composition of search committees, candidates who have been selected for interviews, and all final decisions. If the Director of the Equity Office has concerns regarding the process, she may report them to the President and recommend that the search be suspended.
- ◆ The University does not have a formal program for subsidizing a faculty member's attainment of an advanced degree. However, several faculty members stated that arrangements can be made on a case by case basis to provide funds.
- ◆ Orientation is provided for new faculty members. In addition, individual departments host functions for new faculty to interact with their colleagues and deans.
- ◆ The University provides a welcoming atmosphere for faculty members and most reported very positive experiences at the University.

Concerns

- ◆ Many faculty members cited a high teaching load and rather low salary as deterrents to recruiting and retaining faculty members.
- ◆ Several minority faculty members stated that they experience adversity in the classroom from non-minority students.

Campus Climate

Strengths

- ◆ Students and faculty members commented that they found the University to be very friendly and welcoming.
- ◆ Diversity is promoted throughout the year with many social events and programs.
- ◆ The University offers many programs to incoming students to acclimate them to life at Murray State and in the Murray community.
- ◆ The University and local city council work cooperatively to address campus concerns with local government services, including the police. Periodically, open forums are

held on campus periodically whereby members of the Murray City Council address questions and concerns from the campus community.

- ◆ Students and faculty stated that when problems arise in the town, the University intervenes on their behalf.

Concerns

- ◆ Several African American faculty and staff reported that they have experienced discrimination when searching for housing in the town and have been treated differently by local merchants.
- ◆ Faculty members commented that students often complain and/or give faculty members poor evaluations when diversity materials are used in the classroom.
- ◆ Faculty and staff were uncertain of where to go to report problems of discrimination.
- ◆ Student groups do not communicate their concerns and opinions with one another. The students who attended the meeting believed the current exchange was very beneficial and expressed an interest in communicating more frequently with one another.

Conclusion

Murray State University has implemented several strategies and initiatives that focus on the main areas addressed in the Partnership Agreement - the recruitment and retention of African American students, the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff and campus climate. The University has various facets of the campus community involved in a collaborative relationship to improve the recruitment and retention of African American students at Murray State.

Concerning the recruitment of African American students, the main concern noted during the visit was the lack of resources for the Associate Director of the Office of School Relations. In addition, the perception existed that less emphasis was placed on minority recruitment since this component was enveloped into the University's overall recruitment office.

The University is committed to the recruitment and retention of African American faculty members and staff. Certain factors that are somewhat beyond the University's direct control, such as demographics and locale of the town, work against the University's recruitment efforts. Consequently, the University should develop better incentives to attract faculty and staff to Murray State, such as a formal program to assist faculty members in attaining advanced degrees.

The various comments made by the groups throughout the day made it clear that Murray State University is friendly and welcoming. There were issues in the town of Murray and

in the classrooms that affect African American faculty. It was evident that many students attending the University have not interacted previously with diverse populations, which affects the climate of the campus.

Based on these observations, we make the following recommendations to Murray State University:

1. The administration should allocate additional resources to assist the Associate Director of School Relations in the University's minority student recruitment efforts;
2. The University must develop incentives for recruiting African American faculty and staff members to the University;
3. The University's curriculum should include a diversity component or the University should institute a mandatory course for first-year students to introduce students to multicultural and diversity issues;
4. The administration should continue to work cooperatively with the Murray City Council to alleviate perceived tensions by African Americans when they are in the town; and
5. The University should encourage communication and cooperation between the University's various student groups.

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