

**COMMITTEE ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
VISIT TO MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS
JUNE 8, 1998**

As a result of the campus visit to Murray State University in June 1998, the Committee on Equal Opportunities (CEO) identified areas of strength and weakness on the campus that impact activities which support the objectives of *1997-2002 The Kentucky Plan for Equal Opportunities in Higher Education (The Kentucky Plan)*.

Areas of Strength

1. A board committed to access and equity of underrepresented minorities, specifically Kentucky resident African American students, and a general university-wide awareness of the difficulties and concerns faced by underrepresented populations on campus.
2. A strong support program for recruitment and retention of African American and white students to graduation and a faculty whose make-up includes approximately 17 African Americans with seven tenured and four on tenure track (in 1993, at the time of the last campus visit there were 14 African American faculty at MuSU).
3. A process through which the university's Affirmative Action Committee ensures consideration of diversity when filling major positions by interfacing with search committees to create an awareness of issues and initiatives related to *The Kentucky Plan* and the MuSU Affirmative Action Plan.
4. An articulate and diverse group of students who apparently have made major steps toward learning to adjust to each other and are working toward creating a university community supportive of the total student population.
5. An institution whose philosophy, when developing its residential college format, placed a high priority on the impact of major policy development and implementation in minority and underrepresented students.
6. An institution that attempts to accommodate the social, recreational, and programmatic needs of the minority student community into the general programming process.
7. The committee was pleased with the level of satisfaction expressed by students regarding the commitment of the university to making the campus environment conducive to learning and to meeting their need for interaction with the larger student body.

Areas of Concern or Weakness

1. The president's cabinet lacks representation from the minority community, possibly resulting in a lack of understanding/perspective of the impact of policies on minority students, faculty, and staff prior to their implementation.

2. A minority student body with divergent views of the university community, the support programs, and opportunities afforded African American and white students.
3. A general awareness of the problems and concerns faced by the minorities in the Murray community external to the campus without success implementing programs or activities to overcome those problems or make the community respond to the concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The university should be more active in helping to focus greater attention on reducing tensions, creating a more hospitable living environment, and fostering a sense of community for minority faculty and staff within the greater Murray community.
2. The university should intensify its efforts to increase the level of retention of underrepresented minority students, particularly African Americans. This effort may prove to be more successful through an enhancement of the staff and budgetary support for the Office of African American Student Services and Ethnic Services which is responsible for targeting these populations and providing programming to address retention efforts.
3. The university should intensify its efforts to diversify the faculty and staff. This could be accomplished by identification of promising junior faculty or professionals to participate in intensive training or education programs. The university should explore the possibility of working with the CPE and the two doctoral institutions to identify students to participate in the Southern Regional Education Board Compact for Faculty Diversity program to help create a larger pool of minorities with PhD's to fill faculty positions.
4. The CEO noted the lack of presence/representation of African American staff among the president's cabinet and urges the president to invite the Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity to cabinet meetings as a regular participant.

The supporting information for these areas of strength/weakness and for the recommendations is included in the attached detailed description of the CEO June 8, 1998, visit to Murray State University.

**Campus Visit to
MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY
Committee on Equal Opportunities
Council on Postsecondary Education
June 8, 1998**

OVERVIEW

The Council on Postsecondary Education Committee on Equal Opportunities (CEO) is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the general commitments, the specific objectives (goals) for each institution, and a requirement for annual evaluations of institutional progress toward those objectives as identified in *The Kentucky Plan*. To facilitate the oversight responsibility, the CEO visits campuses during the fall and spring semesters to meet with campus leaders, students, faculty, and other interested parties. These visits are designed to give committee members an opportunity to hear from selected members of the campus community. (The visits are not meant to be scientific, empirical data gathering exercises.) The CEO's intent is to learn first-hand about the success of the equal opportunity plan implementation on campus.

The CEO made a campus visit to Murray State University (MuSU) on Monday, June 8, 1998. The purpose of the visit was to allow CEO members to review institutional activities that support the objectives of *The Kentucky Plan*. The Central-West Kentucky Team and CPE member Shirley Menendez were present during the visit.

ORIENTATION WITH PRESIDENT AND CABINET

Sherron Jackson reviewed the progress of MuSU through the 1996-97 year of the plan. University personnel presented current year data showing that MuSU has made progress since the adoption of the new plan (July 1997) in the areas of recruitment of African American students and employment of minorities in professional non-faculty positions.

President Alexander responded to several concerns by indicating that the university:

- Believes *The Kentucky Plan* is a good idea for the state. The Board and MuSU are committed to equality of opportunity and its successful implementation in spite of various court decisions.
- Believes its success in recruitment of students and staff, in west Kentucky, is impacted by other institutions in the area and by policies related to tuition reciprocity and the desire to see open access for students along the border.
- Believes the campus climate is good and supports student needs. MuSU efforts are totally supported by the community.
- Has worked hard to cultivate relationships in major communities in west Kentucky to identify and recruit African American students to MuSU, including transfer programs with West Kentucky Tech. Programming opportunities at the new Paducah Crisp Center should provide greater opportunities for recruitment of minorities.

The President asked the CEO to look at the possibility of allowing institutions to admit some out-of-state students under a legacy type policy and to review the issue of reciprocity and its impact on institutions not benefiting from these arrangements, i.e. out-migration of African American students.

RECRUITMENT/RETENTION OF FACULTY AND STUDENTS

Recruitment and Retention of Faculty: The CEO met with Don Robertson, the Vice President for Student Affairs (the interim V. P. for Academic Affairs was present as well), directors, deans, and department heads. Information was provided about faculty and student recruitment and retention efforts at MuSU. The institution's Affirmative Action Committee regularly interfaces with search committees to review the institution's progress, revise strategies, and redirect the focus on implementation of plan objectives when making decisions on employment. Institutional management is constantly involved in the employment process. The institutional philosophy is that diversity will enhance the environment for everyone. All areas are held accountable for major positions. If a potential pool is not diverse, a review of the basis for this occurrence is completed prior to employment decisions being made. The deans have responded positively to the need to seek out and find African American faculty. Compared to the faculty complement of 14 at the time of the last CEO visit in 1993, MuSU has made some progress with 17 African American faculty (seven tenured, four on tenure track, four not eligible for tenure, and two on leave working on their Ph.D.). Institutional location and financial issues play a significant role in the institution's success in attracting African Americans.

Recruitment and Retention of Students: University administrators who work in student recruitment, admissions, counseling, and career placement also met with the CEO. MuSU is building the Roads Scholar Program to help the university compete in the recruitment of African American students. In ensuring a positive student environment, Student Affairs set the tone (valuing diversity) and then involved the university community. This is but one element that under-girds the institution's retention plan that calls for assisting students to establish a solid foundation in the freshman year. MuSU's approach to providing scholarship opportunities has provided a greater response from African American students in recent years. The university has elevated affirmative action policy to the prominence of a specific policy of the board. Also it is a specific goal in the university strategic plan. The university supports the development and production of special student recruitment events to further the institution's goal of increasing the number of African American students at MuSU. Also special opportunities are provided to develop leadership through provision of scholarships for students to attend leadership conferences. The vision of MuSU is that west Kentucky will someday have the highest percentage of its students going on to college.

Recruitment and Retention of Professional Non-Faculty: Although MuSU reached its objective of having at least 6 percent of its professional non-faculty employees as African Americans the institution lost ground in this category, moving from a high of 9 percent in 1995 to 7.3 percent in 1996. In response to a question the institution indicated that local/regional industry attract employees from the campus by provide greater financial opportunities. The tight labor market basically encourages employees in various positions to get training at MuSU and then move to industry.

DISCUSSION WITH FACULTY

The CEO met with a representative number of African American and white faculty. The discussion pointed out the need for more opportunities to interact on an informal basis

(departmental isolation). There was no specific discussion regarding the importance of the minority faculty goal or minority faculty aspiration to have leadership positions in the faculty governing body.

Faculty indicated that Murray does not have a lot of social activities for African American or whites. The community is warm and receptive, and there is no evidence of housing discrimination (the chamber of commerce immediately got involved when an international student reported concerns and the leaflet incident arose). However, the university needs to provide additional opportunities for faculty and staff to interact in an informal setting to foster better communications.

DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

The CEO met with a diverse group of MuSU students and was impressed with both the level and intensity of the conversations. Some students believe:

- MuSU should provide additional opportunities, activities, and social function that allow more student interaction.
- Students are attracted to MuSU because of its educational programs.
- Students need to get involved in campus activities if they are going to be successful.
- Greek life is a significant element in the retention of African American students.
- Lack of institutional support and fraternity/sorority houses is a significant disadvantage for Black Greek organizations.
- Based on their experience at MuSU, African American students would recommend the school to others.
- African American students are encouraged to seek elective office in student government and presently serve in appointive positions in student government.
- African American students feel that decisions regarding campus entertainment/social functions are made without their input and desire change in this process (cross over groups etc.).

No student spoke of tension on campus or having been treated differently by campus police or local police. Vice President Robertson indicated that the university provides ongoing training for service personnel to stress the importance of being a positive role model and of diversity. This is done through the “Connections Program” which is responsible for sensitivity training (and even go so far as to ensure that the university bookstore carries ethnic products). In general both African American and white students appeared to agree on the campus climate as they attempt to better relate to each other. It was agreed that there is a need for more African American faculty and that race cannot be the sole ingredient in responses to student concerns.

The CEO concluded its visit with an exit interview with the president and acknowledged reassurance of MuSU’s good faith effort and the level of student satisfaction. The CEO would like to have had someone from the board in attendance.