

**Committee on Equal Opportunities
Visit to Murray State University
Summary and Recommendations
October 26-27, 2003**

Adopted by CEO 2-16-04

Executive Summary

Purpose and Process: The purpose of the visit was to allow CEO members to review institutional activities that support the objectives of *The Kentucky Plan*. The Committee on Equal Opportunities is charged with monitoring institutional progress toward implementing *The Kentucky Plan for Equal Opportunities* and the Partnership Agreement with the U. S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. Monitoring is completed through data analysis and campus visits. The Committee on Equal Opportunities visited Murray State University October 26-27, 2003, to meet with campus leaders, students, faculty, and other interested parties. The meetings are designed to give committee members an opportunity to hear from selected members of the university community. Campus visits are not meant to be scientific, empirical data gathering exercises. The CEO's intent is to learn first-hand about the success of equal opportunity plan implementation on campus. The Central, West Kentucky Team conducted the visit.

Core Focus: The CEO visit report begins by identifying the general focus for review and discussion with the university administration and campus community. The committee was interested in learning about the university's strategies and leadership to implement the recommendations from the previous two campus visits and also to learn about the results of those efforts.

Report Summary: Overall, the university has made significant progress toward full implementation of the commitments and objectives of *The Kentucky Plan*. The university presented data to the committee showing that its performance has consistently improved each year since the adoption of *The 1997 Kentucky Plan*. The recommendations from the 1998 and 2000 campus visits were implemented and resulted in varying degrees of success.

For example, there is a steady increase in the enrollment, first-year retention of African Americans among the student population, but improvements in retention of all undergraduates and the six-year graduation rate are somewhat sporadic. As recommended by the president's Blue Ribbon Task Force, MuSU adopted academic recruitment strategies specifically to address the commitments of *The Kentucky Plan*. The taskforce's recommendations focus primarily on the recruitment of faculty and graduate students, but other strategies identified by the report address student recruitment and retention. The university used the taskforce's recommendations to strengthen its "grow your own" program to identify promising faculty and staff for more intensive training or education. Also, the university has shown success in maintaining representation of African Americans at the executive, administrative, and managerial levels. By comparison, the university has encountered difficulty in its effort to increase and maintain African Americans as faculty and professional staff.

The deployment of military personnel at Fort Campbell has to some degree negatively impacted the university's ability to maintain continued growth in enrollment. Given the demographics of Fort Campbell, the military deployment may negatively impact enrollment of African American

students. More resources were allocated to the area of school relations to support minority student recruitment efforts, a diversity component was included in the curriculum to introduce first-year students to multicultural and diversity issues, and the university continues to collaborate with the Murray City Council to foster a sense of community among the MuSU students, faculty, and staff with the greater Murray community. As further evidence of the university's efforts, President Alexander shared data with the committee regarding the negative impact of rising student costs as compared to limited student financial aid, including his presentation to the Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness of the U. S. Congress. Also, the president noted a number of collaborative initiatives that are designed to recognize and encourage greater participation by underrepresented minorities in the campus community.

Recommendations by the Committee:

1. The collaborative efforts of the university are improving the environment for the students, faculty, and staff. The university should strengthen its cooperative relationship with the Murray City Council to further alleviate the disparities perceived by African Americans as they do business in the city. The university should engage the city directly and encourage them to embrace the African American students, faculty, and staff.
2. The university appears to have addressed many of the issues raised by the students and faculty; a more prominent mode of communication should be employed to inform the university community of the actions taken.
3. The retention efforts of departments seem to lack focus. The university should develop incentives for the retention and recruitment of African American faculty and staff to Murray.
4. A factor repeatedly raised regarding retention of faculty and staff was the Murray P-12 environment. The university should engage the faculty and staff in discussions to identify specific concerns that relate to decisions to leave Murray and to address these concerns forthrightly with the Calloway County P-12 system.
5. Students and faculty reported that they encounter difficulties locating housing in the Murray community. The university should strengthen its counseling for students and employees regarding outside agencies that are available to assist them with housing discrimination practices and encourage student and faculty to avail themselves of these resources by placing information on the university's Web site or other prominent locations on campus.

Recommendations or Concerns to CEO:

1. The university indicated that faculty and staff who want to pursue graduate education on their own do not have opportunities in the immediate vicinity and suggested that the CEO support collaborative Ph.D. programs on the campuses of the comprehensive institutions.
2. An MuSU staff person, by letter, stated:
 - She is troubled by the campus visit because those speaking do not provide a complete picture of the environment on campus or in the city.
 - While those attending the sessions noted the negatives, there has been significant improvements by the MuSU campus and the city of Murray. However, she admits

that more needs to be done. She provided examples of misstatements by others regarding services available in the community.

- The president asked “all” African American faculty and staff to his home to ask their input on policy and to get suggestions. A luncheon for African Americans is held at the Curris Center on a regular basis to seek input. The president makes an effort to interact and serve as a role model for individuals on the MuSU campus.
 - In a number of the situations raised during the discussions, the reasons that disparities for African Americans exist relate to personal qualifications and histories rather than reluctance by businesses to hire African Americans.
3. It is suggested that the CEO find ways to better educate the audience regarding the purpose of *The Kentucky Plan*. The CEO’s interest in conducting a balanced discussion of the campus environment -- the good as well as the difficulties -- should be shared to assist the committee in holding the university accountable and to assist the CEO in making constructive recommendations to the university administration.

Discussions with Constituent Groups

Recruitment and Retention of Students: The Division of Student Affairs and the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs discussed strategies and programs intended to directly influence the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students, including their impact on the welfare, growth, and development in all dimensions of student life at MuSU. The goals: to provide students the opportunity to set and achieve personal goals within their capacities; to provide students the opportunity to develop effective vocational and professional competencies moving toward post-baccalaureate and graduate experiences; to assist students in preparing for participating as responsible members of local, regional, national, and international communities; and to develop students’ co-curricular and academic partnerships through residential colleges and other experiences.

Strengths

- Diversity is an important component of the University Strategic Plan. The university division identifies and reduces organizational and personal factors that contribute to student attrition.
- The university has a Public Administration Degree transfer agreement with KSU and the KCTCS that should increase enrollment.
- The university recently established a McNair Scholars Program (33 percent minimum participation is composed of minority students). The program assists the university to increase minority student enrollment and student success and to develop a larger pool of qualified students to pursue graduate education.
- The division provides the support services necessary to assist students to develop a healthy lifestyle and integrate and coordinate these services into the university community.
- The division provides motivation for student participation in the life of the university and community including exploration of personal value and ethical systems.

- The division strives to develop a secure, healthful, and barrier-free environment. It critically evaluates functions, objectives, and trends to strengthen services and seeks innovative approaches to facilitate the educational process.
- The division supports and promotes the residential college system to have maximum impact on campus.
- The division supports and promotes the efforts of the First-Year Experience Office and the retention plan.
- The University's Enrollment Management Team continues to meet 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 uses 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 an aggressive system to track student progress and deploy intervention strategies. For example, retention timelines, toll free number for parents to contact the Office for Student Affairs, parent information link on the MuSU Web page, focus groups, retention alert program, progress reports from faculty every six weeks, the freshman reading experience, upper-class mentors, second-eight week classes, academic restoration plan, block scheduling, secure advising system, and a retention news letter.
- The Graduate School offers scholarships and fellowships to African American students interested in pursuing advanced degrees. The university also 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.
- The university offers financial support for curricular development and multicultural programs for African American students at MuSU.

Challenges

- The university must generate more effective strategies to gain access to a greater pool of African American high school graduates because of the limited number in the Murray service area.
- The university continues to have difficulty increasing the six-year graduation rate of African American students. While there has been a slight increase in the rates from 1999 to 2001, white students graduated at a rate over 10 percent higher each year during that same period. However, the MuSU graduation rate is the second highest among Kentucky public institutions.
- The university administration's support for diversity in the core curriculum is not clearly stated.

- The university needs to employ student access strategies that might increase the amount of need-based financial aid for minority students to pursue their education and, if possible, tie the aid to the cost of education.
- Student housing employs a limited number of international and African American resident assistants.
- The university provided evidence that the businesses in the Murray community are responding to some of the needs of African American students (such as hair care products, etc.) but somehow this information is not being communicated to the students.

Recruitment and Retention of African American Faculty and Staff: The Director of the Office of Equal Opportunities and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs led the discussion regarding the strategies and programs that directly influence recruitment and retention of African Americans as faculty or professional staff. *The Plan's* commitment is to increase the number and proportion of African American faculty and staff employed by institutions of higher education. MuSU committed to advertise positions in minority publications, participate in recruitment and placement services at national conferences, utilize direct mailing to minority organizations and traditionally African American institutions, emphasize the importance of following established guidelines, continue to ensure minority representation on university search committees, and provide minority faculty and staff with financial assistance to travel to professional and developmental workshops.

Strengths

- The university's Office for Equal Opportunity is directly involved with all faculty and professional staff searches. The office reviews position advertisements, the composition of search committees, candidates who have been selected for interviews, and all final decisions. The Office for Equal Opportunity works directly with the provost to monitor progress and to develop and revise hiring strategies for the academic area. The director, with the support of the president, may intervene in a search if there are major concerns regarding the process.
- The university provides a formal orientation for new faculty members that include discussions about the campus environment and the environment in the Murray community. In addition, individual departments host functions for new faculty to interact with their colleagues.
- The university reported that an informal survey of new African American faculty and staff suggest that the university provides a welcoming atmosphere and most reported positive experiences.
- The university reported that advertisements are placed in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Black Issues in Higher Education, and America's Job Bank, as well as electronic Web sites and direct mailings to encourage African Americans to apply for faculty and staff positions.
- The university reported that the president has established a special funding program to encourage departments to pursue employment opportunities of African Americans.
- The university reported that assistance is provided to African American faculty to pursue an advanced degree. One faculty member has since separated from the university to enroll at the

University of Kentucky through the SREB Doctoral Scholars Program as a dissertation scholar with financial support provided by UK. However, as part of its informal program, MuSU has extended an offer of support to three African Americans to pursue the doctorate.

- The university reported that it has entered into a faculty exchange agreement with Kentucky State University.

Challenges

- While the university reported that a “Grow Your Own” program exists, it is not a formal program that provides financial support for all African American faculty. However, several faculty members stated that support could be obtained on a case-by-case basis.
- The university reported that the loss of African American faculty and staff by attrition has had a profound impact on African American student retention rates.
- The university reported that it is concerned that African American faculty interested in pursuing the doctoral degree on their own do not have access to Ph.D. programs in close proximity to Murray.
- The faculty and staff reported that upward mobility for African Americans at MuSU is limited because they have not earned the doctoral degree.
- The faculty and staff reported that incentives for African American employees to remain at the university are very limited.
- While the perception of faculty and staff was not substantiated by data, they felt that African American representation is primarily reflected in areas such as the Department of Education and intercollegiate sports but should extend to other areas across the Murray campus. The university should make available to the campus community information to help everyone to better understand efforts to diversify departments and colleges.
- The faculty and staff reported that they have encountered major difficulties while their children attend the Murray public primary and secondary school system, i.e., the treatment of minority children, particularly African American children. There is a great need for teachers in P-12 that shows a cultural awareness and sensitivity to the needs of African American children.
- Faculty and staff indicated a concern that for some the use of power and authority is a greater issue at MuSU than is racism and stated that they were uncertain of where to go to report such problems.

Discussion with Students Regarding Campus Climate: The Plan’s commitment is to create a hospitable campus environment and to address campus and campus/community issues with the goal of improving the campus climate for minority students.

The Division of Student Affairs discussed strategies and programs that are intended to directly influence enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students, including their impact on the welfare, growth, and development in all dimensions of student life at MuSU. The goals: to provide students the opportunity to set and achieve personal goals within their capacities; to

provide students the opportunity to develop effective vocational and professional competencies moving toward post-baccalaureate and graduate experiences; to assist students in preparing for participating as responsible members of local, regional, national, and international communities; and to develop student's co-curricular and academic partnerships through residential colleges and other experiences.

Strengths

- The university reported that if students report problems with the local Murray community it employs both informal and formal processes to resolve them.
- The university reported that it established a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Diversity to address campus and community issues with the goal of improving the campus climate for minorities.
- Students reported that they found MuSU to be very friendly and welcoming. Also, the opportunity to interact with the president in informal settings is critical to their perception of the university and the environment.
- Students reported that diversity is promoted by the university administration throughout the academic year with social events and programs. The president typically attends these events to show his support of MuSU's diverse student population.
- Students and administrators agree that MuSU offers many programs to acclimate incoming students to life in the academic community, as well as the local community. These programs are typically well attended.
- Administrators reported that the university and local Murray City Council work cooperatively to address student (campus) concerns with local government services, including the police. Open forums are held on campus whereby members of the Murray City Council address questions and concerns from the campus community. Students and faculty agree that when issues arise in the town the university intervenes on their behalf.
- The students who attended the meeting believed that the discussion with CEO was very beneficial and expressed an interest in communicating more frequently.

Challenges

- There is a perception among some students that there is a hostile work environment in the student housing area that affects the provision of services and student employment. Other students believe that the university has dealt with the issues affecting student housing.
- A number of students, faculty, and staff reported that they have experienced discrimination when attempting to secure off-campus housing in the city of Murray and on occasion have been treated unfairly by local merchants. These persons acknowledged that in terms of the housing issues they have not reported their experiences to the proper authorities, i.e., the local housing authority or the Kentucky Human Rights Commission.
- A number of students stated that they believe that Murray is a closed community and that social tensions exist in the community. However, no specific examples were cited.

- The students commented and the university noted that opportunities for social interaction or entertainments are limited for African Americans in the Murray community.
- Student groups acknowledged that they themselves do not communicate concerns and opinions with one another.

Conclusion

Murray State University has implemented a number of strategies and initiatives that have produced major improvements in the specific areas identified by *The Kentucky Plan* – the recruitment and retention of African American students, the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff, and the campus climate. Various facets of the campus community are involved in a collaborative relationship to improve recruitment and retention of African American students, faculty, and staff to MuSU.

The primary concern noted by the university that impacts its recruitment efforts is the small population of African American high school graduates in the area. Additionally, the university noted challenges in increasing the graduation rate of Kentucky resident African Americans.

The university reaffirmed its commitment to *The Kentucky Plan* and the recruitment and retention of African American faculty and staff. They acknowledge that certain factors may be beyond the university's direct control, such as demographics and locale. Consequently, the university is working to strengthen the incentives to attract faculty and staff to MuSU and Murray, such as a formal program to assist faculty members in attaining advanced degrees or focusing on issues related to the P-12 system.

The various comments made by the groups throughout the day made it clear that Murray State University has made a lot of progress but, at times, the Murray community also can be unfriendly and unwelcoming. It was evident that many students attending the university have not interacted previously with a diverse population that affects the climate of the campus. Also, it was clear from the comments that the university has focused its energies to develop a cooperative relationship with the Murray community to foster a more hospitable environment.

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