

From Freshman to Graduate: Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students

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Abstract: The purpose of this research project was to identify methods to retain minority teacher education candidates and identify curricular and environmental factors that affect recruitment and retention of minority teacher education candidates and student teachers. Because of the low enrollment of minority students in the department in comparison to the number of minority teachers in the state, the researchers desired to ascertain why students choose to remain or leave the department. Focus groups were conducted with minority students to collect information on retention factors.

Resumen: El propósito de este proyecto de investigación fue el de identificar métodos para retener estudiantes minoritarios candidatos en educación magistral, e identificar factores curriculares y medioambientales que afectan el reclutamiento y la retención de candidatos minoritarios en educación magistral. Debido a la baja inscripción de estudiantes minoritarios en el departamento en comparación con el número de maestros minoritarios en el estado, las investigadoras quisieron asegurarse de la razón por la que los estudiantes elegían quedarse o salirse del programa para estudiantes-maestros en el departamento. Grupos de enfoque se condujeron con estudiantes minoritarios para coleccionar información sobre factores de retención.

Keywords: minority teacher education; recruitment; retention; attrition

During the spring of 2000, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction established the Recruitment and Retention of Minority Students Committee (RRMSC) to explore ways to recruit and retain minority students. Minority was defined as African American, Afro-Caribbean, Asian/Pacific Island, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Native American. The terms used to describe different ethnic populations vary by author; however in this article, the researchers have chosen to use terms like African American to refer to Black American individuals, Caucasian American to refer to Whites and Euro-American individuals, Latino(a) to refer to Hispanic individuals, and Asian/Pacific Island to refer to American individuals of Asian descent. The terms

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Hispanic and *Latino(a)* are used interchangeably in the 2000 census reports (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). The Office of Management and Budget defines Hispanic or Latino individuals as descendants of Central American, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, or other Spanish cultures irrespective of race (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). On a regional level, in some areas Hispanics are referred to as Latinos(as). The largest minority in the southeastern state in this study is African American, followed by Hispanic American, Asian, Native American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Concerning the teacher population, 1995-1996 statistics show 27.8% of the southeastern state's teachers are African American with the majority of teachers (72.2%) being Caucasian American. Concerning the percentage of teacher education graduates for the state, statistics for the same year show that only 11% were African American, 88% were Caucasian American, and 1% was other (Attrition and Retention Task Force, 1998).

Because of the critical discussion of university policies and practices, the identity of the university is not mentioned in this article. Although the southeastern university referred to in this study has the second largest teacher education degree program in the state, of the five traditionally White institutions in the state, for the fall 2000 enrollment, the university ranks fourth for the number of African American students attending the university (Kanengiser, 2001). During the same year, the university ranked number one concerning the greatest number of students classified as "other" (Kanengiser, 2001). During the 1999-2000 school year, 469 students graduated from the College of Education with 259 of the graduates being Curriculum and Instruction majors. At the southeastern university, the number of education graduates, for the 1999-2000 school year, by ethnicity was 72 (6.500%) African American, 1 (.002%) was Hispanic, and 369 (84.000%) were Caucasian American. Of the 73 minority students in the College of Education, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction had the largest percentage of minority graduates (27 students or 37%; Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Effectiveness, 2000). However, the 27 African American students of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction's minority population only make up 10% of the department's 259 graduates. During the year 1999-2000, there was a total of 321 ethnic minorities listed as Curriculum and Instruction majors, the largest percentage in the university.

International students have attended the southeastern university since the 1800s, yet the university desegregated, by admitting the first African American student, during the summer of 1965. In the fall of 2000, approximately 35 years later, the enrollment of minority students on the main campus was 2,547. During the 1999-2000 school year, 27 out of 259 minority students graduated from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. As of the fall 2000 semester, the number of minority students enrolled in

the department was 321 (Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Effectiveness, 2000). Nine African American students participated in the study.

Literature Review

Student retention has been the focus of research studies for more than 25 years. One of the earliest works was conducted by Astin (1975), which validated the effects of institutional context on retention of residential and commuter students. Today, African American students, Latino(a) students, and Native American students continue to be underrepresented in institutions of higher learning (Parker, 1997). Since the late 1980s, fewer African American students have been enrolling in higher education (Parker, 1997). Statistics from the United States Department of Education (2001) showed for 1997-1998 that only 8.3% of bachelor's degrees were received by African American students, 5.5% of bachelor's degrees were received by Hispanic students, 6.0% were received by Asian or Pacific Islander students, and .7% were received by American Indian/Alaskan Native students. The National Collegiate Athletic Association reported that 56% of Caucasian American students and 36% of Black students had graduated after 6 years at public Division I colleges and universities (Reyes, 1997). At independent Division I colleges and universities, 51% of Black students graduated after 6 years and 72% of White students graduated after 6 years (Reyes, 1997). Although the statistics presented here are not just referring to athletes, the information can be representative of the larger population because Division I schools are the most populated colleges and universities in the United States (Reyes, 1997).

Concerning recruitment, White colleges are recruiting and contacting White males at higher rates than other groups. Minority males are contacted at lower rates than other groups (Kimweli & Richards, 1999). The fact that minorities are not being recruited is disconcerting because, in a study of a sample of 293 minority high school students from 23 public high schools in five of the nation's largest urban school districts, 90% of the students connected college attendance with future career aspirations (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). In addition, Noeth and Wimberly found that 96% of the participants of the study indicated plans to obtain an undergraduate, graduate, or professional degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D.). If minorities believe higher education is essential to fulfillment of career goals and plan to obtain advance degrees, then why are these students not being recruited and/or why are they not graduating with the degrees near the same percentage?

Steele (1992) noted that 70% of all African American students enrolled in 4-year college programs drop out, whereas only 45% of Caucasian American students drop out. During 1999, African American students made up 13% of college enrollment and Hispanic students made up 9% of college

enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Although statistics from reporting agencies vary, it is evident that on a national level, graduation and retention of minority students are low. There are a number of reasons for the attrition of minority students.

Steele (1992) commented that African American students are dropping out of college not because they don't value education but because of not identifying with the school they attend. Cockburn (2000), Parker (1997), and Credle and Dean (1991) argued the need for institutions to become more culturally sensitive. Madkins and Mitchell (2000) suggested that some minority students who attend some majority colleges and universities encounter institutional and noninstitutional racism. Encountering discrimination may play a role in students' decisions to remain or not to remain at a university. Other researchers commented about indirect, racially motivated comments that are delivered verbally, nonverbally, and/or visually, which are referred to as *microaggressions* (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Solarzano et al. (2000) also found that microaggressions may affect the academic performance and achievement of students of color.

There are other institutional barriers that affect the retention of minority students. Institutional barriers to Black student retention include lack of understanding of the culture of Black students, unawareness of and inability to address the needs of Black students, inappropriate academic standards, inability to assist Black students in navigating the university system, and negative attitudes of Black students by university personnel and administration (Credle & Dean, 1991). Currently, teacher education programs don't have the infrastructures necessary for managing the changes caused by diversity (Kimweli & Richards, 1999).

Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000) identified six themes concerning pressures, demands, and experiences of 75 minority students at a predominantly White university in their research of intergroup relations. The themes were racial stereotyping (academic and behavioral), pressures or expectations to assimilate, exclusion and marginality, White ignorance and interpersonal awkwardness, White resentment and hostility about affirmative action, and the focus on Black and White.

Some researchers site other factors for the attrition rate, which include academic preparedness and time on task (Bagayoko & Kelley, 1994). Academic preparedness refers to the academic readiness of a particular student for university course work. Time on task relates to the amount of time students expend on studying or assignments. Reyes (1997) contended that the high number of minority students who are inadequately prepared for college may bear little relation to the higher rates of attrition of minority college students. A study conducted by USA Group Noel-Levitz showed that more than 37% of the students who left school had grade-point averages higher than 2.5 (Reyes, 1997).

On the other hand, Rummel, Acton, Costello, and Pielow (1999) have asserted that some attrition is positive for a university. These authors purport that if universities graduate inferior students, the reputations of the universities can be tarnished. Rummel et al. (1999) contended that a university should assess reasons for the attrition of students and support students who are academically as well as socially successful. Because the number of minorities entering and graduating from college remains low (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and because of the low number of minority students entering and graduating from college, colleges and universities are searching for ways to attract minority students to teacher education programs and ways to retain them.

The need for minority teachers is evidenced by the fact that between the years of 1997 and 2009, enrollment in public schools is expected to grow to 48.1 million. Forty percent of the 48.1 million students will be minorities, with 12% in the teaching force (Olson, 2000). African American and Hispanic students' enrollment in public schools has increased in the past 20 years, with African American students making up 17% of the public school population and Hispanic students making up 16% of the public school population in 1999 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). According to Archer (2000), ethnic and racial minority students will make up more than 50% of the student population in the United States between 2030 and 2040.

Almost one third of the current student population in the United States is from minority groups, compared with only 12% being minority teachers (Archer, 2000). Only 4.1% of U.S. teachers are Hispanic and 6.8% of U.S. teachers are African American (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

With the paucity of minority teachers, the need for minority teachers in American public schools, and the small numbers of minority students enrolled in colleges and universities, it is essential that teacher education programs recruit and retain minority students in their programs. As Jacqueline Jordan Irvine has stated (Archer, 2000), "If you want to find good African American teachers, they are in the schools now" (p. 33), which could also be extended to include other minority groups.

Analytical and Theoretical Framework

The data were analyzed using critical race theory (CRT). Key components of CRT include a focus on the racism "enmeshed in the fabric of our social order," use of storytelling to understand people's experiences, critique of liberalism, and the premise that White individuals were the primary recipients of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1999, pp. 212-213). The researchers did not want to solely measure our students' comments against existing literature or theory, however, the researchers did use other sources of literature to examine the perspective of other researchers on the topic. In a sense, the researchers took a partial phenomenological approach

to analyzing the data, specifically ascertaining patterns in the data. In addition, the researchers wanted to represent what CRT has a tendency to do (i.e., giving voice to marginalized groups). “Critical race theory enacts an ethnic epistemology, arguing that ways of knowing and being are shaped by the individual’s standpoint, or position in the world. This standpoint undoes the cultural, ethical, and epistemological logic (and racism) of the Eurocentric, Enlightenment paradigm” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 159).

Ladson-Billings (2000) contended that CRT allows for the deployment of racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. Components of CRT include the unmasking of racism, the use of narrative rendering, critique of liberalism, and recognition of Eurocentric privilege in legislation (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Through the use of CRT as a framework, the researchers were able to view how the Department of Curriculum and Instruction as well as the university environment were supportive and positive for minority students. The researchers wanted to discover practices that might be inherent in our university procedures and policies. Narrative inquiry was employed in the research questions, which is consistent with CRT. One premise of CRT is that the use of narratives is necessary to understand people’s experiences and to show how the experiences relate to how society works (Ladson-Billings, 1999). The researchers wanted to discover how, as a whole, the department was supportive of minority students along with focusing on how any practices of the department and university were put into practice for majority students. These goals could be explained and documented through the use of CRT. Also, in Ladson-Billings’s (1999) research of four teacher educators and two teacher education programs, she asserted, “CRT can be a way to explain and understand preparing teachers for diversity that moves beyond both superficial, essentialized treatments of various cultural groups and liberal guilt and angst” (p. 241).

Because CRT has only recently been applied to education, the researchers thought it apropos to follow Ladson-Billings’s explanation of the theory as she has used it in her studies of teachers who are successful teachers of African American students. All of the students in our research, although on the university level, were African American, which was a common link between our research and Ladson-Billings’. Last, the department strove to successfully prepare educators of minority students.

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of the research was to identify methods to recruit and retain minority teacher education students and identify curricular and environmental factors that affect recruitment and retention of minority teacher education candidates and student teachers.

Participants

Two focus group interviews were conducted during the spring of 2000. One focus group was made up of senior-level students who were completing their student teaching internship. The first sample included three African American students or 11% of the Black Curriculum and Instruction student population who graduated during the 1999-2000 academic year—two males and one female. The initial focus group was secured by asking university supervisors and professors to announce the sessions in the student teaching seminars. The second focus group was made up of teacher education majors from a variety of levels including one sophomore, three juniors, and two seniors. The sample included six African American females or 2% of the Black Curriculum and Instruction student population. The researchers solicited participation for the focus groups by placing an announcement of the interview session in each student's academic folder during advising week.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Focus groups were conducted to solicit input with regard to the experiences of minority students at the university in order to “(a) explore and discover concepts and themes about a phenomena [*sic*] about which more knowledge is needed, (b) add context and depth to the understanding of the phenomena, (c) provide an interpretation of the phenomena from the point of view of the participants in the group, and (d) observe the collective interaction of the participants” (Solarzano et al., 2000, p. 64). The interview included 10 open-ended questions with regard to the experiences of minority students at the university. In addition, the questions sought to provide insight into why the university was selected for college attendance and particularly why teacher education was chosen as a major field of study. Some questions were structured using narrative inquiry. “Narrative inquiry is a methodological approach of understanding people's representations of the world, their actions in it, through the stories they tell” (Gomez, 1997, p. 195). “Narrative researchers aim to understand why people think and act as they do in the situated contexts in which they live and labor” (p. 195). The interview questions were compiled and finalized by a Curriculum and Instruction assistant professor, in consideration of related recruitment and retention research articles (e.g., Claude Steele's [1992] “Race and the Schooling of Black Americans” and Julie Blair's [2000] “Power of the Posse”) shared during the Retention and Recruitment of Minority Students Committee (RRMSC) and topics that evolved during RRMSC meetings. During the meetings, participating faculty discussed information they desired to know concerning student experiences. The questions that were generated during the meetings formed interview questions. The focus group sessions were recorded with an audiotape and subsequently transcribed. The interview questions are as follows:

1. When and why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What made you decide to come to [name of university] to study teaching (instead of studying somewhere else)?
3. Tell me a story about a time when you felt very welcomed. Or tell me a story about a time when you felt like you were really a part of things here at the university.
4. Tell me about a time when coming to school was very difficult.
5. Tell me about a course that was really excellent for you. What made it excellent?
6. What makes being here at [name of university] (in the College of Education) different for you as a minority student compared to the experience of White students?
7. Would you recruit students to [name of university]? What would you say to high school seniors to recruit them to [name of university]? OR What would you say to a younger sibling or relative in trying to recruit them to [name of university]?
8. What groups on campus (or in education) do you belong to?
9. Why do you choose to belong to those groups?
10. How would you describe a perfect teacher education program?
11. If you were to provide input to College of Education faculty concerning course content that would include diversity issues, what would some of the main issues be? Use your own experiences from high school to answer the question.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The interviews were transcribed, then read and organized into commonalities. After organizing and reorganizing the commonalities on three separate occasions, final categories of data were established.

Analysis of the research revealed two main categories of the data themes—recruitment factors and retention factors. The 10 themes were (a) call to become a teacher, (b) selection of the university for a degree, (c) reputation of the university, (d) interactions with faculty and peers, (e) current course content and successes, (f) challenging experiences at the university, (g) university climate and culture, (h) perceptions, expectations, and misconceptions, (i) suggested curricular and university-wide changes, and (j) mentoring and support. All of the above themes pertained to retention. Some of the themes pertained to both recruitment and retention, primarily Themes B, C, G, and I.

Theme A: Call to Become a Teacher

Initially, the researchers queried students to determine their reasons for entering the teaching field. The researchers acknowledged that motivational factors affect a student's competence or willingness to achieve in the area. For the student teacher group (focus group 1) as well as the mixed-level group of teacher candidates (focus group 2), the primary and recurring responses for becoming a teacher were (a) need for teachers in society, (b) love of working with children, and (c) the influence of in-service teachers

they had as students or knew personally. Their responses correlated with the responses of 1st-year teachers on a national level. The desire to teach is intrinsically fostered. One student commented, "My mom, she's already a teacher and I used to always go to the classroom and watch her." Another student commented, "I just see the need for teachers."

Theme B: Selection of the University for a Degree

The reasons for selecting the university varied among the students. The reasons included location, recommendations by high school advisors, reputation of the institution, and recommendations by relatives. On the other hand, one student mentioned that initially the size of the institution prohibited him or her from wanting to attend. The student envisioned that there would be little room for instructor-student interactions. Another student mentioned that the university recruited at the high school; others did not receive recruitment literature from the university.

Theme C: Reputation of the University

With regard to reputation of the university, prior to attendance, students perceived that the size may have limited faculty-student interactions and there would be instances of racism. Students commented that they perceived, which is concurrent with the statistical data, that there would be few minority students and faculty. In the first focus group of student teachers, they envisioned being able to have better faculty-student interactions, as minority students, at a historically Black college or university. Students commented that the size of the university wasn't as much of an issue after attending the university. Students were told by family and friends that they would encounter racist experiences at the university. Examples of actual experiences are discussed in the section on Theme F, Challenging Experiences at the University.

Theme D: Interactions With Faculty and Peers

Interactions with faculty and fellow majority students have been both positive and negative. Negative experiences pertained to not feeling welcome in social encounters with majority students. A student from the first focus group commented that a minority professor was tougher on minority students in a class, because of supposedly wanting to prepare them for college life.

From analyzing the data, it was evident that students felt that positively interacting with faculty and other students helped them to remain at the university. Students' responses revealed that having faculty assist with advising was a factor that encouraged them to remain at the university. One student

recalled the experience of registering for classes: “When I came to register I couldn’t get in like any classes and I was here like all day . . . I was really upset. Then Dr. ____ . . . made me feel better.”

Other positive interactions were with majority students. One student from the first focus group commented positively about an experience while living in the residence halls:

Male Student: One instance my freshmen year here I was kind of down, broke and I didn’t have any money then. One guy [a White student], he came down and he uh was about to order a pizza and he offered it to me and he asked me what kind did I want. It was for him but he asked me what kind did I want? He was going to share with me. And I thought . . . I felt real good about that.

The student teacher commented that he had made a conscious effort to not focus on or look for negative experiences, but to block out what people had told him about predominately White colleges.

Theme E: Current Course Content and Successes

When communicating with students about “excellent” courses and what made the courses excellent, two characteristics emerged. Primarily, students in both focus groups commented about the content of the courses. If a course had content that was practical, exposed the students to new information and resources, or helped students improve specific skills or performances, the course was successful. Practicality implied that the course related to the real world. A second characteristic of an excellent course was having an excellent professor. A professor was excellent if he or she showed concern for the students, made the course interesting, and incorporated hands-on activities into the lectures.

Theme F: Challenging Experiences at the University

An additional theme was challenging experiences at the university. Although some challenging experiences related to Theme D, interactions with faculty and peers, the experiences extended beyond interactions. The experiences included taking classes under instructors who were not supportive, instructors’ stereotypical and prejudicial remarks about minority students, and financial difficulties.

Students were bothered with financial concerns that affected their academic experiences because either they had to work while attending school, spent excessive amounts of money for class projects and practicums, traveled away from the university to complete practicums, and incurred transportation costs relating to travel to practicum sites. Sometimes class activities prevented the students from working, which necessitated securing

school loans. Additional concerns pertained to purchasing books for classes if the books are never used. A student from the first focus group commented that, if advising a sibling or friend to come to the university to major in education, she would tell them, "You need a car and a lot of money." The following narrative from the focus group of student teachers reflects beliefs about financial restrictions.

Male Student 1: Most students are independent, on their own.

Female Voice: Right. I mean, cause I am. I mean . . . and last semester I was at a very . . . a disadvantage because I didn't work. You can't . . . I was in [completing a practicum in a town 28 miles from the university], I couldn't work.

Male Student 1: You can't work.

Female Student: I couldn't work. And that was the first six months that I have not worked. And I almost . . . I cried everyday. I didn't know how I was going to make it, how I was going to get gas in my car. And my parents . . . they would have . . . they helped me, but I just would have had . . . I was at a disadvantage because I wasn't used to that, you know.

A student in the second focus group also commented about the financial restraints and not having the same level of funds that the perceived majority students had.

Male Student 2: And I don't want to just point at her you know and blame her, and I don't feel that I'm the blame that she just told me that I just need to stop . . . just give up some of the stuff and you know. Okay, if I give up my job then, I have to give up school. And . . . and the job was not you know, interfering with my school work, so like she said . . . maybe that's what I should do and I felt my own way about it. And then she told . . . it was like maybe three, three I believe . . . three or four African American students in the class, and she had told one of them because all of them were having the same problem . . . she told one of them she said I'm harder on you all because I know it's going to be harder on you, you know.

In addition, students were asked to describe how they handled challenging experiences. When asked about networking with majority students to reduce financial expenses, minority students named reasons pertaining to interactions with peers. The interactions relate to what Lewis et al. (2000) refer to as "interpersonal awkwardness." The same female student teacher who commented about costly travel to school sites also spoke on the topic of interacting with White peers.

Dr. Horton: Did you feel comfortable car-pooling with White students?

Female Student: Yes, I mean I did. No, I didn't. No I didn't. No I didn't, because we tried that. We tried that the first two weeks. We tried that. And they made us feel so uncomfortable that, you know, your person that you're supervising

now [another minority student who also rode with the same group of majority students].

Dr. Horton: They didn't include you all?

Female Student: They didn't include us. I mean . . . and we'd gone through classes for the past three or four semesters with these students and we thought, you know . . . well, they're okay. But, when it came down to being around them everyday, that was a no-no.

Because the university is located in a rural area of the southeastern state, many of the methods, practicum, and student teaching placements are in neighboring towns of the university. Other financial expenses included purchasing materials and computer software for the development of portfolios or other educational projects.

In another instance, a student from the first focus group spoke of a challenging experience with a minority professor. The African American professor placed higher restrictions on minority students. The student commented about what strategies were employed to cope in the instance.

Male Student 2: Yeah, it seems like, okay we . . . I was Black . . . And my teacher and I were Black . . . you know. She [another student] was really upset about it. And this person really gets upset about nothing, but never gets upset at all. She was real upset about it. And that . . . that class . . . um, I've never been the type of person . . . okay, I'm going to settle for a C you know. But in that class I said if I get a C, I'm going to be happy. That was the first thing . . . you know it kind of shocked me that it was my first time . . . you know, I've made C's before, but never because you know I just gave up. And I was like . . . Cause it seems like nothing we could do would measure up.

The student decided that acceptance, of whatever grade he received, was the strategy he would employ and appeared to feel unable to pursue other options.

Theme G: University Climate and Culture

For the theme of university climate and culture, learning to assimilate, accommodate, or cope in a majority environment was a reality. Students in both focus groups believed the university catered to the requests of White students. Students commented that university departments and organizations practiced policies that were more supportive of White students. The findings relate to Lewis et al.'s (2000) findings that White students are not always aware of how their behaviors negatively affect minority students. The authors termed the experiences as "exclusion and marginality" (Lewis et al., 2000). For example, when selecting entertainers to come to the campus, the university chose mainstream groups that mostly majority students

listened to. Students from both the student teacher focus group (focus group 1) and the mixed-level focus group (focus group 2) commented about the entertainment issue.

The students in both focus groups believed that the university showed differential treatment between minority and majority fraternities and sororities with regard to the use of certain campus facilities and resources. Students in the first focus group claimed that minority groups were always required to obtain security when holding events and that majority groups did not have to pay for security. Another student claimed that White students would not get in trouble for alcohol use on campus whereas Black students would.

Also, students cited evidence of discrimination in room assignments in residence halls. Whole wings of residence halls are reserved for the members of White sororities and fraternities. A student in the first focus group commented, "We're just separated and thrown all over everywhere." Students discussed that negative campus interactions makes one ask, "Should I stay or should I go to a . . . Black college?" The experiences caused minority students to consider unifying as a group to advocate that their needs be met. Whereas students in both focus groups recognized that discrimination in many areas existed at the university, they admitted that White students held more support and financial resources simply because they are and have been the majority population. A student from the second focus group commented,

Student F: But my thing . . . from being in a sorority, and from knowing that to say if we did do that we wouldn't have the backup that maybe Kappa Delta would have. Because we have, as if you know . . . as if we said like . . . AKA's said we're going to have something for African Americans . . . you know . . . then . . . you know what I'm saying? We don't have the resources that they have. And I feel like sometimes [name of university] might back . . . you know . . . them up a little bit more than they would us.

Student E: Right . . . true enough. But we have to start working with what we have to show them that you know we're serious about getting things done.

The same two students also had disagreements about the approach to take for resolving the issues or about the source of the issues, using the comparison of "getting inside the door" and "having to fight." The following dialogue provides a glimpse into student disagreement over how to resolve the climate and culture issues.

Student E: But look we weren't let in the door before . . . I'm not . . . I agree with you. That's what I want you to see. But I'm saying the same thing that our people had to go through the back then, don't think that we . . . we . . . we still don't have to fight you know to get there.

Student F: But my thing is, I pay just as much as anybody else . . . why should I have to fight? That's my question . . . why should I?

Student E: They weren't . . .

Student F: I can fight. But why should I fight?

Student E: Because you're not getting what you want. So what you gon do is . . . are you gonna . . . that's what I'm saying.

Student F: But I'm not going to fight for it I'm just going to ask for it. You know what I'm saying just like . . . just like somebody else is doing.

Student E: And you know what . . . you're never going . . . we're not going to get it. You see . . . you see the way the system is going. We're not getting. What do we need to do in order to get?

Student F: Things like this. I think things like this are exactly what we need. I don't think that we have to you know, protest. I think things like this will get the . . . will get the point across.

Although the student wanted to advocate for the same rights as majority students because she was a paying consumer of the university too, the student wanted the same rights as White students because of entitlement, not by pressure or persuasion.

Theme H: Perceptions, Expectations, and Misconceptions

Students commented on the stress of being the only minority in a class. Students felt that "it will make you strive . . . to be the best you can be." Students perceived that it is necessary for them to prove themselves to the professor by doing more than what was required. Students perceived that some White instructors grade Black students lower than actual performance in a course. Specifically, students in both focus groups perceived that some instructors think that Black students will be satisfied with a C or believe minority students will fail. Because of low expectations from majority faculty, Black students will need to have confidence and advocate for their correct grade. Our findings were similar to Lewis et al.'s (2000) findings from their study of 75 undergraduate minority students. The authors found that White students viewed minority students as less competent or tokens and referred to the treatment as "academic stereotyping." Expectations and conceptions also extended to minority faculty who, as described by students in the first focus group, believed it necessary to be tougher on minority students.

Theme I: Curricular and University Changes

One student from the first focus group commented that to improve the course content, the department should infuse diversity into all courses. Adding multiculturalism to existing courses would help students and faculty relate to and understand minority students better. A student from the second focus group believed that courses should move beyond focusing on U.S. history or European history and should incorporate information about other cultures into the courses.

Another theme that resonated with the second focus group was the inclusion of Praxis examination preparation into the courses. Mississippi students wanting certification to teach must complete the professional education and specialty areas of the Praxis exam series. Students must have acceptable scores for their area of degree.

Although students did not believe that passing the Praxis examinations meant a student would become a good teacher and did not believe that passing the Praxis examinations was an issue for only minority students, they commented that Praxis assistance should be available for students. Ladson-Billings (1999) also asserted that testing standards were not related to teaching performance. One student knew about the Praxis I course offered by the department. Additional workshops could be held throughout the semester to help students prepare for Praxis II. Although the department has no control of the costs for taking the tests, a few students wanted the test to be offered for free. The students' beliefs align with Ladson-Billings's critiques of standardized testing who stated, "Creating tests as screens or barriers to admission seems to appease the public outcry for higher standards, even when those standards have no relationship to performance. The more relevant question thus becomes: How can teachers' ability to teach be tested? More specifically, how equitable and reliable are teacher assessment measures for ensuring that teachers will be effective in classrooms of urban children of color?" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 257).

Another improvement for the department and the university would be to offer more scholarships to minority students and to have more educational resources for education majors, in the form of education centers or an education building. Students compared the lack of resources of the education department to the abundance of resources in other departments, like engineering. Students believed that the expenses they encountered as education majors were costly. Other improvements were suggested for the student teaching program (a separate office from the department). They are discussed further in the subsequent section, *Mentoring and Support*.

Theme J: Mentoring and Support

Mentoring and support were mentioned by students in the second focus group as an area where the College of Education could improve substantially. Students felt that when they were out in the field teaching at a school site, they needed support from the college. Students felt "alone," which was a factor they believed extended to majority students as well. A student teacher from the second focus group commented as follows.

Student: Not getting the support that I necessarily need from the university, because you sent me out there . . . you know . . . so I'm saying don't put . . . I

know that we have to go through and experience being a teacher on our own. But even when we go into the school, I don't want to be in a school where I'm just out there and I'm just a teacher.

Student E: If I at any point decided that you know, if I got to that level, where they asked me to be a university supervisor . . . if I could not dedicate more time to my students, I would decline the position. Because of . . . there have been situ . . . I know . . . I know of people, and I'm just not talking about minorities who have decided I don't want to be in education anymore. Good people, people that know their stuff, you know. People that I looked up to in my classes, coming through the education department. I think that's sad.

Dr. ____: What do you think makes them not want to be in education anymore?

Student E: I don't think they had the support that they needed from the . . . right . . . from the university, from the school.

Another student teacher in the second focus group believed that they had support from the field supervisor, who also happened to be a minority, but they weren't getting the same support from the cooperating teacher.

Student: You signed up to say that you wanted a student teacher, then you have to come to the realization that . . . you know . . . you have to know your role. And see . . . their meeting . . . a lot of the teachers that's over us . . . their meeting isn't until . . . until later. You know . . . I think that maybe prior to that semester that they give student teachers, you might have a week. Because up coming seminar every Tuesday . . . every other Tuesday . . . you might need to seminar some of those teachers.

Mentoring and support extended to faculty and student interactions, university field placements, and cooperating teacher professional development.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall findings from the research suggest the importance of giving support to students during course work, practicum experiences, and student teaching. Support comes in the form of mentoring from cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Support is derived from financial support to students. Support is derived from sharing of educational resources that can be used to teach children and youth. The students' comments with regard to mentoring were similar to the educational literature on mentoring. Researchers (Harper, 1994) claim that mentoring programs aid in retaining minority students. In Stolworthy's (2001) study, he found that mentoring aids in retaining students, and all students benefit from mentoring.

Also, it is important to make courses meaningful and relevant to students. Courses can provide a balance of theory along with application and practice to help students succeed in teaching and on the Praxis exam. Along

with the findings, there are several implications for practice to be followed and research to be conducted.

Another aspect of mentoring would be to work with the cultural diversity center on campus to avail students of productive social activities and to host seminars that help students prepare academically. Currently, the College of Engineering Administration hosts the "How to Get a 4.00" workshop for engineering majors. Astin (1985) claims that student involvement in campus activities leads to academic success. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) postulate that academic success is dependent on students' educational goals and the opportunities available for academic support and social involvement. Tinto (1993) held that students who feel a part of the university are more likely to complete their degree. Students' educational goals, commitment to the university, and personal background aid retention.

Implications for Practice

In addition, the researchers will apply the findings of the study to develop policies that will help retain minority students in the department. Recently, the RRMSC has been meeting to find ways to recruit minority students to the program (which is the committee's current charge). Howard and del Rosario (1999) comment that teacher education programs should be proactive and aggressive in attempts to attract students of color in order to promote racial dialogue. They also comment that teacher education programs should elevate the levels of sensitivity of professors.

The RRMSC acknowledged that departmental changes were needed to encourage more minority students to pursue teaching as a field of study. Also, the RRMSC realized the need for becoming active in assisting minority students after entry in the department. To accomplish the desired outcomes, the RRMSC has planned to meet with Future Educators of America high school groups to discuss departmental requirements, entry to college, readiness for college, and funding. Jones, Yonezawa, Ballesteros, and Mehan (2002) commented that the university has to work with high school students to increase the pool of eligible minority students. For example in California, the university system works with K-12 educators to prepare underrepresented minorities, specifically, Latino(a) and Black students for college eligibility (Jones et al., 2002). Working with high school students more closely will also facilitate correction of the recruitment inadequacies mentioned by the focus groups.

Some administrators and faculty of the university have wanted to limit the enrollment of undergraduate students. The reality of enrollment limitations may have the potential to affect the entry of minority students in the program and university. Jones et al. (2002) commented,

Limited enrollments will constrain outreach efforts if they are actually successful, that is, if more and more students become eligible Ironically, many

students recruited through outreach would be turned away because of an upper limit on enrollments, a . . . larger pool of qualified applicants, and . . . stiff competition from other students. (p. 10)

Limiting enrollment is disconcerting because there is already a shortage of minority teachers, currently and historically, particularly of Latino(a) and Native American teachers. The percentage of African American teachers has also declined over the years (King, 1993). Yet, ethnic and racial minority students will make up more than 50% of the U.S. student population between 2030 and 2040 (Archer, 2000).

Because the state recently settled the Ayers Case—a desegregation lawsuit against the state—the court system, Justice Department, legislators, and the Institutions of Higher Learning (the governing board of universities in the state) have a crucial and powerful role in regulating the enrollment policies of the universities. As a result, the admission requirements of the universities are strictly monitored.

Another goal will be to secure funds for the implementation of policies and practices that address students' retention-related suggestions. The department must perform on a higher level in advertising resources available for students. A participant of the second focus group commented about the need for resource centers. Currently, the department has science and mathematics laboratories with resources, educational materials, manipulatives, science apparatus, and journals for teacher candidates and in-service teachers. Also, the campus teaching and learning center offers courses for Praxis I preparation and free tutoring in academic subject areas. It is evident that students need to become aware of supportive student services.

Although not necessarily designed for minority students, because it addresses concerns of the second focus group, the department has added 1-day Praxis II workshops to prepare students for the exams. Another initiative has been for faculty to take the Praxis II exams and revise courses to include Praxis II preparation strategies. The head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and some elementary education faculty/instructors have taken the exam. Other retention programs, like Project TEAM conducted by Indiana universities, have used similar practices by incorporating National Teacher Examination preparation workshops for its participants (Bennett, 2002). Teacher competency exams, like the Praxis series, affect the efforts of minority teacher candidates to in-service teachers (King, 1993). Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that teacher preparation programs should be held accountable for graduating teacher candidates who are poorly prepared to pass the tests, as opposed to the preservice teachers themselves.

Another task of the committee will be to present the findings of the study to faculty, staff, and the department head along with specific recommendations to be followed. These steps are particularly relevant, after comparing our data with CRT. The researchers did indeed find practices that

reinforced the status quo of the university. To reiterate the importance of recognizing the role of diversity, in the curriculum and in serving and interacting with students, the committee hosted a seminar for selected faculty to discuss how diversity awareness has been implemented in their classes with department professors and instructors.

Other administrative personnel on the university level should be availed of any discriminatory acts of any departments or units on campus. In addition, faculty can work cooperatively with the campus cultural diversity center to inform students of procedures to follow for reporting discriminatory behavior. In addition, Avery and Burling's (1997) study revealed that a campus climate of openness and supportiveness aids in retaining minority students. Students who feel a part of the university are more likely to be successful in the completion of a degree. A sense of belonging can also be gained from positive student-teacher interactions, positive student-student interactions, participating in organizations and societies, or from participating in extracurricular activities (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

During the spring of 2001, a diversity retreat was planned for faculty to attend the Civil Rights Museum and Rock and Soul Museum of Memphis, Tennessee. The trip was canceled due to budget constraints. The trip would have been beneficial for faculty and would have emphasized the importance of diversity. If majority faculty begin implementing multiculturalism components in their courses, perhaps majority students would embrace diversity more. Integration of the components would help facilitate integrated pluralism. Integrated pluralism allows for various racial and cultural groups, majority and minority, to appreciate the contributions and traditions of varying groups (Bennett, 2002). Integrated pluralism moves beyond assimilation of the majority culture (Bennett, 2002). In addition, Bennett stated, "With integrated pluralism, students discover and maintain their own family histories, values, and traditions. At the same time, they participate in settings that establish the conditions for inter-group contact that enable them to learn about, understand, and respect student peers from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds" (p. 27).

Implications for Future Research

The research study should be expanded to other diverse populations including participants of a variety of ethnicities, disabilities, and relationship orientations who are served by the department, College of Education, and university. For example, Quiocho and Rios (2000) also noted that

Latinos experience many of the same difficulties that all ethnic minority students face when pursuing teacher education as a career: testing biases, negative perceptions of the teaching profession, teacher education curriculums that are unresponsive to their cultural capital or that fail to facilitate development of a

culturally responsive pedagogy, and pressure in field-based experiences to conform to traditional approaches to teaching. (p. 523)

Comparisons between different groups of participants can be made to determine commonalities and differences.

A follow-up study of both original focus groups should be conducted to determine if the students remained in the program or graduated from the program. Additional questions would include the following: (a) are they teaching, (b) what are their opinions of the findings of the study, and (c) do they have additional suggestions? The researchers are aware that at least five of the participants, who were all student teachers at the time of the study, have graduated. At least three of the five are teaching. One of the student teachers is completing graduate studies in counseling education. One of the students from the second focus group became a social work major. Additional follow-up communication with the participants would provide valuable information.

Conducting the research to ascertain reasons minority students remain in the department has been a valuable process. Value is derived in that concrete ideas for improving the department and university were gleaned from the research. As well, the students themselves provided significant suggestions. Conducting the focus groups afforded the department a meaningful learning experience about what has been done to retain minority students and what efforts could be improved.

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