

An Institutional Assessment Process in Recruiting, Retention, Orientation and Placement of Minority Students

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Abstract

The paper presents a model that may be used by an institution of higher education (IHS) to enhance its existing graduate minority enrollment. It is essential for any IHS to have a short- and long-range strategic plan. As an essential element of any university's healthy growth environment, it is important to include diversity in its mission of strategic planning. To achieve the dynamic requirements of diverse growth, it is mandatory to increase the existing graduate minority student enrollment to a specific number by a target year including the existing institutional enrollment trend. The model suggests that a graduate minority program must be established first and should be housed in a graduate school as part of the organizational chart of a university set-up administration. Dedicated and committed efforts are needed throughout the university colleges and departments to actively participate in the implementation of a graduate minority enhancement program through recruitment, retention, orientation and professional development workshops. An effective and workable model is to place such a mission under the university's overall mission. The university mission will have the ability to continuously deliver productive students to the society. The keep up with diversity, offering of fellowships and financial aid is needed to attract qualified underrepresented social/ethnic groups. Such a mission will be accomplished through vigorous recruitment of top quality graduate students, maintaining and hiring diversified top administrators and staff with faculty engaged in state-of-the-art teaching, research and service. The paper presents steps needed to enhance minority enrollment. Finally, there is a mechanism that will provide feedback from all colleges within the institution for the continuous assessment and improvement of overall programs.

INTRODUCTION

In general, graduate students from minorities, who demonstrate financial need, are still significantly underrepresented in the percentage of doctorates earned, comprising less than five percent of the total PhD population (1). The paper is directed for institutions of higher education

(IHE) to incorporate diversity in their strategic plan. An IHE mission should also focus on attracting graduate minority students. Most U.S. universities strive to build upon leading programs of exceptional teaching, innovative research and dedicated service by maintaining a strong curriculum, a highly qualified and committed faculty, outstanding facilities, and essential funding. This paper presents a model to be used by IHE with an objective to enhance the enrollment of qualified graduate minority students. Increased fellowship with an evaluation plan is presented with steps for recruitment and stages for student selection. Effective strategies are presented to increase the flow of qualified underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The establishment of a graduate minority program is essential in the successful implementation and enrollment of qualified minority students. After the enrollment of qualified graduate students, it is important to keep track of each student's academic progress. A student's academic advisor plays a vital role in supporting and retaining students until the completion of the student's academic program.

A PROPOSED MODEL

Figure 1 presents a proposed university model with a mission statement focusing on the enhancement of graduate student enrollment. Note in this figure that any IHE can increase a qualified minority over a certain time span. Such enhancement is possible through aggressive recruiting and retention.

The mission of IHE should be to enhance the development and implementation of programs for graduate students of superior ability who demonstrate financial need and plan to pursue a PhD degree in a designated area of national need. The IHE can successfully implement such programs by aggressively promoting recruitment, retention and orientation of talented graduate students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds and award a fellowship to qualified graduate minority students.

How the IHE Increased Fellowships Will Meet the IHE's Overall Objectives

Strategic plans must exist in every IHE. All colleges and departments within their universities must develop consistent strategic plans. The department strategic plan must be consistent with the college and university strategic plan. The IHE strategic plan can only be successful, if the strategic plans of the departments and colleges are in full support of the IHE's strategic plan. Each college and its departments must work closely with the dean of the graduate school to identify, recruit and retain qualified underrepresented graduate students in line with the goals and objectives of the IHE program. The IHE must allocate certain numbers of fellowships to each college. From that allocation, each college must give a certain number of fellowships to each of their departments. This process assists each department to use their own recruitment process in conjunction with their college and university recruitment program to attract graduate minority students. The IHE must develop an aggressive recruitment, retention and orientation program. Figure 1 presents an IHE model strategic plan that provides a basis for each department to develop and enhance their recruitment program under the IHE's main umbrella.

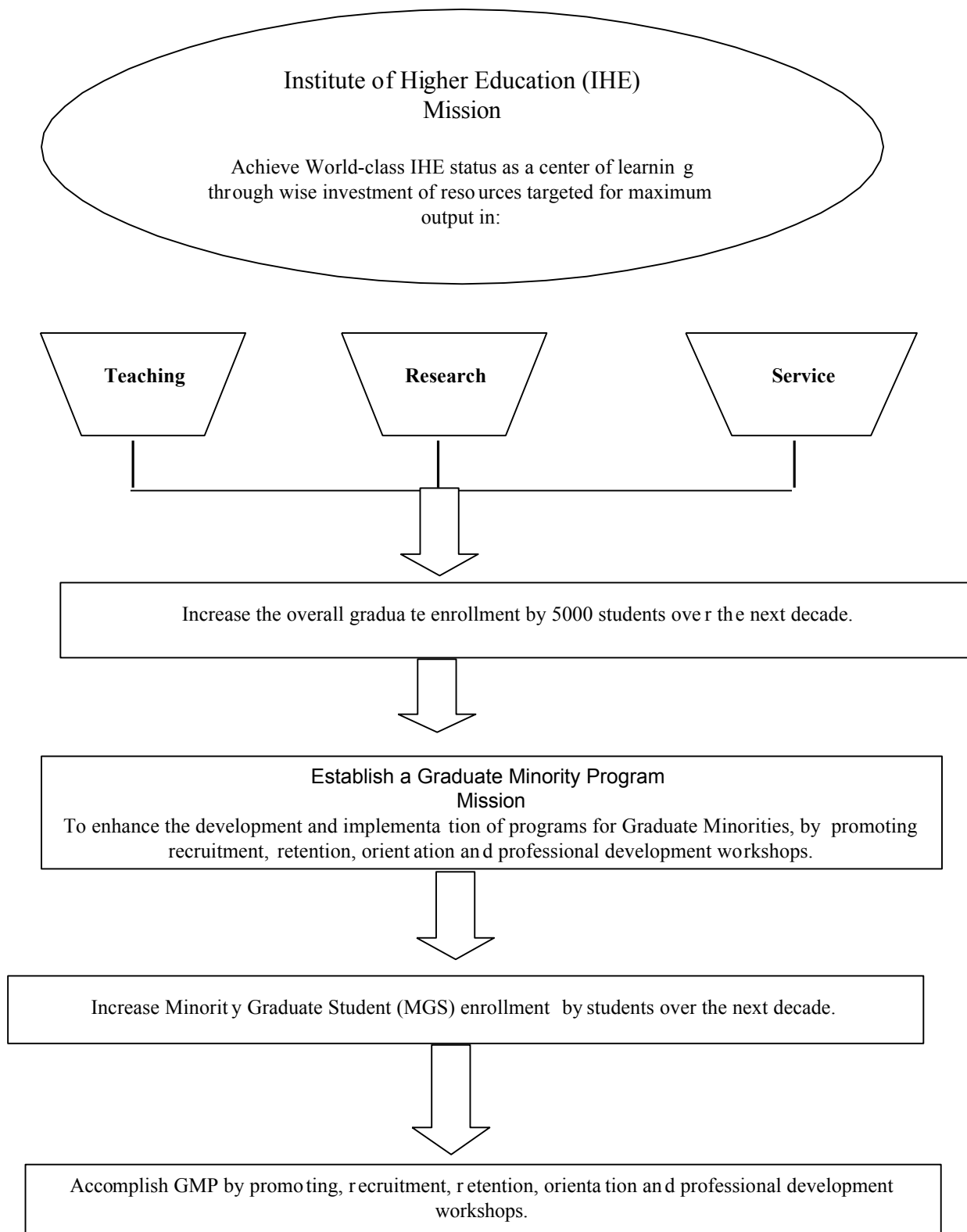


Figure 1. (Contd. on next page)

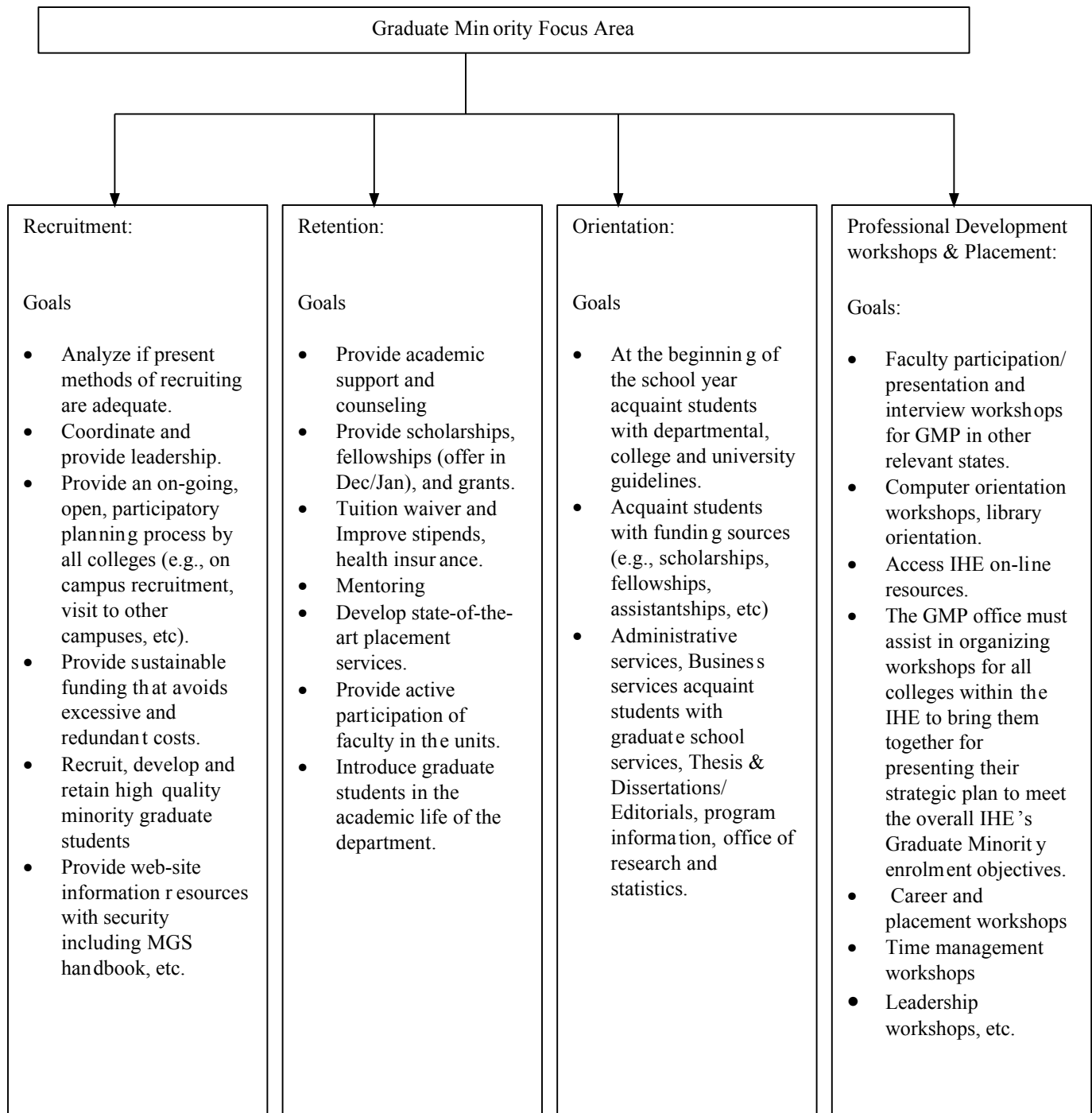


Figure 1. A proposed model of the IHE Mission to achieve world-class status and

enhance the overall graduate enrollment and those of graduate minority students of superior ability.

EVALUATION PLAN

Relate the Specific Goals and Objectives of the IHE Program

The goals of the IHE program are to increase the number of qualified graduate minorities from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. Each department within the college should closely work with the office of the IHE Graduate Minority Assistant Dean to aggressively recruit graduate students. A typical pattern of recruitment and stages for student selection include:

- Defining the pool of qualified individuals
- Recruiting applicants
- Screening out applicants who do not meet minimum qualifications
- Selecting the most acceptable from among all qualified applicants
- Persuading recruits to accept offers to pursue careers or advanced study in a field
- Training and socializing recruits
- Providing opportunities for successful recruits to make a smooth transition from training into meaningful employment trajectories.

The process above can be used by each department to recruit existing qualified minority students within the department as well as from other universities. Vigorous minority recruitment, backed by financial assistance such as fellowships, can yield improvements in each department's enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Figure 1 presents goals for recruitment, retention, orientation and placement. An institution can establish its objective to increase graduate minority students enrollment, by a certain number, over the next decade. Considering the current minority graduate student enrollment trend, each department will use their existing allocated number of fellowships and provide support to a certain number of new graduate minority students over the next decade. Increasing the enrollment of talented graduate students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds would definitely meet the set objective of any IHE diversity program.

Assess the Effect of Offering IHE's Fellowships to Graduate Minorities

The purpose of the IHE diversity program should be to realize and understand barriers to academic mobility and to identify effective strategies to increase the flow of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The departments within each college should be able to successfully achieve the IHE goal by recruiting and increasing the number of assistantships to new graduate students of superior ability who demonstrate financial need and plan to pursue PhD degrees in a designated area of national need. The IHE's fellowship should be offered to those qualified persons of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders and ages and persons with disabilities. With the help of the IHE fellowship program, each department's retention and graduation rates will be

significantly improved. Furthermore, it will have a large impact on the expansion of the overall candidate pool.

Process and Product Evaluation

The process includes working closely with the Deans of the Graduate Minority programs to recruit qualified students. After a successful recruitment process, the evaluation questions become critical to the successful completion of the education of the graduate students. Once students are enrolled in the IHE's fellowship program, the designated course advisors in each department should meet with the candidates on a regular basis to evaluate the student's educational activities and progress. Each candidate will have a separate file including the list of courses for the duration and completion of his/her PhD program. On a regular basis, the designated professor will meet the IHE's Fellowship Program Director, who is the Assistant Dean for Graduate Minority. The professor will brief the program director on the status of the student's progress. Accordingly, the director of fellowship program will update his management plan regularly.

Process and Product Evaluation Measures

An advisor, who is also a student mentor, will be assigned to each student. A mentor-mentee relationship will be established. A mentor shares valued skills to improve the mentee's marketability. The mentor will work closely with the mentee to broaden the mentee's educational perspective, support the mentee's academic and social endeavors, foster activities in academic organizations and other leadership roles and consistently serve as an available resource (2). Data from Table 1 enable student advisors to assess a student's progress and provide complete assessment reports to the IHE Fellowship Program Director.

Data Collection Procedures

The IHE Fellowship Program Director will develop a spreadsheet including each candidate's name, gender and ethnic background, such as American Indian or Alaskan, Asian or Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic American and person with disabilities and others. Other developed spreadsheets will include course lists of candidates with possible graduation dates, work schedules, regular meeting schedules, work progress on a daily, weekly, monthly and semester basis. This type of data collection procedure is very effective in retaining and evaluating a student's overall academic standings. Students and advisors must be responsible for developing assessment data that is updated regularly and kept by all parties involved in the assessment program.

Applicants' Accessibility to Their Data Record

Each graduate student has full access to his or her work progress. Students maintain their work progress records (e.g., courses, grades, etc., Table 1). Similar assessment tables should also be developed to reflect the student's research work progress. From these tables, applicants are able to analyze their work, adjust and make improvements on a regular basis, and report to their advisors. Reports can regularly be collected by a student advisor and submitted to the IHE's Fellowship Project Director. The director evaluates the reports, makes necessary comments and returns to the student's advisors.

Time-Line Chart

A table can be prepared showing student name, admission date, semester attended (e.g., Fall, Spring, Summer). For instance such a table can be compared with another table (work progress) showing student name, list of activities, person responsible, start date, completion date and status. These types of tables, including Table 1, for each candidate should provide key evaluation processes and benchmarks reflecting each candidate's overall progress.

Table 1. List of Courses for Graduate Students Pursuing Master's Degree

Name ITTICHAJ JIVACATE SSN 800-4-0648
 Area of Study PUBLIC WORKS ENGINEERING Degree Sought M.S.
 Committee Chairman DR. FAZIL T. NAJAFI Option: Report
 Expected Date of Graduation SPRING2002 Thesis

Course Number	Course Title	Term	Cse Cr	Des Hrs	Anal Hrs	Grade
ENS 5449	Scholarly Writing	Fall01	03	0	0	S
CGN 6936	Graduate Seminar	Fall01	01	0	0	S
CCE 5035	Construction Planning&Scheduling	Fall01	02	2	0	A
CGN 5606	Public Works Management	Fall01	03	1	2	A
CCE 6037	Civil Engineering Operation I	Spr02	02	2	0	A
CES 5607	Behavior of Steel Structure	Spr02	03	2	1	A
CGN 5135	Project Optimization & TQM	Spr02	03	2	1	A
CGN 5605	Public Works Planning	Spr02	03	2	1	A
SUR 6395	Topic in GIS	Spr02	03	0	3	A
CGN 6905	Special Problems in CE	Sum02	04	0	0	A
STA 6166	Statistical Methods in Research I	Fall02	04	0	0	A

CEG 5105	Geotechnical Engineering	Fall02	03	0	0	A
TTE 5256	Traffic Engineering	Fall02	03	1.5	1.5	A
CGN 6905	Special Problems in CE	Fall02	02	0	0	B+
CGN6974	Master Report	Spr02	02	1	1	A

CONCLUSION

In the past ten years, in most US-IHE, the enrollment of persons with different racial and ethnic backgrounds has been low. A typical model is presented in this paper. The model is flexible and can be used by any IHE to increase the enrollment of graduate minority students. To make the model work, IHE needs to allocate resources and provide fellowships to qualified minority students. Student advisors play a vital role in retaining and keeping track of student's academic progress and making sure that they complete their study program and graduate within the specified time period.

List of References

1. Pearson & Leggon, 1987, "Black, Hispanic and White doctoral students: Before, during and after enrolling in graduate school," Princeton, NJ, Educational Testing Service.
2. University of Florida Minority Mentor Program, 2002-2003, Handbook, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

Acknowledgement

The model idea came from reading "The University of Florida Strategic Plan," developed in August 2002 by Dr. Charles E. Young, the President of the University of Florida.

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Dr. Najafi is a professor of Civil and Coastal Engineering at the UF. He earned his BS, MS, and PhD degrees in Civil Engineering from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He has worked for 37 years in government, industry, and education. Dr. Najafi has been a participating member of several engineering societies including ASCE, TRB and ASEE.

Dr. Nick M. Safai

Dr. Safai has his PhD from Princeton University. He is the chair of the Engineering Department at SLCC. Professor Safai has worked with industry and academia. He has had projects supported by DOD, DOE and oil industry. He is a member of several engineering societies including ASCE, ASME and ASEE. He is the chair of International Div. ASEE Annual.