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**SHIFTING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND THEIR IMPACT ON A MIDWESTERN  
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S TRANSFORMATION:  
PREPARING FOR CHANGE**

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## **Shifting Student Demographics and Their Impact on a Midwestern Higher Education Institution's Transformation: Preparing for Change**

I always considered science, western science, this very reductionist process that we march through and it does put blinders on us in terms of how we, particularly, think of creativity and innovation. If you listen to these students talk, they say, 'we talked about different concepts of time and different concepts of the earth and how you relate to everything.' It's not an either or thing. That is one thing that we have been very careful to present. Its two different views and both views are right. They are beginning to open their minds to other possibilities and understanding in different epistemologies. I think that is going to make them more creative students.

How research discoveries, innovative ideas, and epistemological transformations are introduced and expended within American higher education classrooms seems inevitably changing as the undergraduate student body profile evolves.. As one academic leader described above, it is a transformation within oneself to begin to offer new ways of thinking for undergraduate students to consider for their research endeavors and their perspectives toward the global and cultural fabric of society.

In this paper, a qualitative study with a grounded theory emphasis is described The purpose of the study was to capture the impact for associate deans, department chairs, and administrative leaders about an emerging historically-underrepresented, racially and ethnically diverse student population at the Midwestern University. Our hope was that we might discover useful insights about possible solutions to prepare for forthcoming shifts of the undergraduate student profile. We also anticipate offering strategies for the University to intentionally plan for

the transformation of its student population in ways to meet its vision and commitment to excellence.

Studying historically-underrepresented students at a Midwestern research university is particularly important because the research university is the gateway toward productive citizenship, educationally purposeful activities and practical problem solving, a highly competent and innovative workforce, and a society on a lifelong continuum of learning (Association of American Universities, 2008, March; Sandmann, 1996, April). The university analyzed in this study was a large, public research university with five campuses reaching all corners of the state. Founded in mid-1800, the diverse economic needs of citizens in areas across the state helped define each campus' mission. Focusing on its metropolitan campus, the university awards over 11,000 degrees annually in more than 370 programmatic areas. Research endeavors take place in over 350 academic centers throughout its 17 colleges, including inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary collaborations. In 2008, there were over 28,500 undergraduate student; 18% of those undergraduates self-reported as students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The 2008 new entering freshmen cohort proved to be the highest academically prepared in the university's history., Its percentage of students of color has grown since 1998 but remains fairly stable at 20% since 2006 (Sullivan, 2009). Further, out of the nearly 3,500 faculty members, 15% report that they belong to a racial or ethnic population in 2008 (2008). As a public university, its mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and public service aims to enhance opportunities and avenues for innovative thinking and practices across its state , the region and globally.

This inquiry was guided by research questions designed to look at fundamental issues concerning "academic leaders'," or associate deans, department chairs, and administrative

leaders', experiences with the emerging racially and ethnically diverse students seeking higher education at a public research university:

1. How are academic leaders adapting to the changing student demographics and their potential impact on the instructional or support services they provide?
2. What is the role of academic leaders to handle the changes in the university's student demographic population?
3. What response is needed by academic leaders to support a future profile of university students?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section describes the American demographics in higher education.

#### American Demographics in Higher Education

Since the beginning of American higher education, colleges and universities have acknowledged and embraced the social and ethic responsibility to ensure “the nation’s leaders would be well prepared, intellectually and morally, for their responsibilities in the republic founded on reasoning” (AACU, 1995, p. xi). As the beneficiary to the scope of pluralism, continual transformation will take place as the student demographic profile changes (AACU, 2008; Clayton-Pedersen et al., 2007; KewalRamani, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007). Historically-underrepresented students are enrolling at a faster rate than Whites/non-Hispanics, but how institutions can retain these students, many of whom are first-generation college students, and increase their likelihood of success poses a challenge (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2007; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). The past actions of higher education leaders to diversify its student population have been significantly influential and their actions going forward for addressing the student body’s educational and service needs are significant

(Musil, 2000). Thus, higher education leader's actions during a period of significant shifts and profound changes within the organization are critical (Gillapsy, 2008; Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2007).

### *Current Demographic Trends in American Higher Education*

Changes in the higher education student demographic profile are inevitable across America over the next decade (AACU, 1995; AACU, 2008; Beckham, 2000; Frey, 2006; Morrison, 2003; Solmon, Solmon, & Schiff, 2002). The higher education student population will become more diverse as the number of historically-underrepresented students outpace that of Whites/non-Hispanics in parts of the country (Anderson, 2003; Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007; Hurtado, Sàenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008). Specifically, as the overall traditional college-age population increases by 17% (to 20.4 million) between 2005 and 2016, enrollments for Hispanic students are expected to increase by 45%, as enrollments for White, non-Hispanic students are projected to increase by 8% (Hussar & Bailey, 2007). In addition, public high school graduates are projected to increase nationally by 6% between 2003-2004 and 2016-2017, but states have dramatically different scenarios (2007). For example, 28 states and the District of Columbia are projected to have decreases in high school graduates; out of the 28 states, 7 states and the District of Columbia will have a decrease by 15% or more (2007). Higher education institutions are unavoidably at the point of modifications in its curricular, programmatic, developmental, and service offerings as a result of the increasing number of college-bound students of color and the downturn in the number of high school graduates.

Many higher education institutions have recently undergone either a dramatic shift or not in their undergraduate student profile. Evidence of greater racially and ethnically diverse student profiles exists at institutions located in the Southwest and Western regions of the country;

institutions located in the Midwestern and Eastern states, however, are facing a new demographic student profile in the near future (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2008). For instance, in the Southwest region, the University of Florida's undergraduate population of students of color was 27% in fall 1998, and this percentage increased to 38% in fall 2007 (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2007). In contrast, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor had a -9% change in its students of color profile from 1998 to 2007 (USDE, 2007), even though the Michigan state demographer predicted that the state will become more diverse (Campbell, 1996; Darga, 2005, April 21). State projections indicate an emerging shift in demographics across the country. At some higher education institutions, minimal shifts for students of color profile from year to year, however, may reduce the perceived need and urgency by academic leaders for changes to occur on campuses.

#### *Prevalent Demographic Trends at a Midwestern University*

As a Midwestern public research university that is geographically situated in a large metropolitan area, 18% of undergraduate students and approximately 20% of new entering freshmen self-reported as belonging to a racially or ethnically population. Likewise, changes in public high school enrollments will affect the racial and ethnic characteristics of those students progressing into postsecondary education settings in this Midwestern region. By 2010-11, the Midwest region can expect the population of students who are White/non-Hispanic to decline from nearly 75% to nearly 71% and will most likely be replaced with students from Hispanic descent (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2008). Further projections indicate a cumulative percent change in Midwestern public high school graduates from 2004-05 to 2021-22 will grow to 140% in the Hispanic population and nearly 85% in the Asian, Pacific Islander population, while the White/non-Hispanic population will decline 13%. "Many of these

students are from families occupying a lower rung on the socioeconomic ladder, and more likely to speak English as a second language, and come from backgrounds historically underserved by our educational system” (2008, p. 33). The diversification of society calls for pointed attention from educational and business leaders, secondary and postsecondary educators, and local and state policymakers to consider its affects on the curricular advancements, student services, and leadership and professional development and progression.

## METHODS

In this study, the impact on academic leaders as they transition from a fairly stable student demographic profile to a student demographic profile that is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse at the Midwestern University was explored. The structure for this qualitative study comes from a grounded theory philosophical orientation. This section includes specifics concerning the design and methodology used in the study.

### Overview

As a step toward addressing the research questions in this study, we convened an advisory group that included a faculty member, two university-wide directors, two administrative leaders, a graduate student, and a local school district representative. The group met three times throughout the year to assist in the research design, interview protocol, and review and comment about the findings and recommendations. We sought the group members' advice and suggestions throughout the study.

This research project included a total of ten participants from five of the 17 colleges and professional schools and two central administration units: 4 associate deans, 4 department chairs, and 2 administrative leaders. Participants were selected based on the pervasiveness of students taking coursework from a particular academic unit to meet graduation requirements and the

quantitatively identifiable changes in the academic unit's students of color profile over a 5 year period. One-on-one interviews were conducted between April and May 2007 for 1 hour. Participants were asked a series of 6 to 7 interview questions. Answers were digitally recorded and also hand-written notes were taken and the information was transcribed using NVivo computer software. Throughout the interview process, transcripts were analyzed and key themes were identified. These themes then defined the findings of the study and provided a framework for recommendations.

## FINDINGS

In this section, our interview findings are summarized, followed by a discussion of the results and an analysis of the gap between what we expected to find and what we actually found. Five main categories or themes arose out of our one-on-one interviews:

- 1) Evidence through Data
- 2) Shared Understanding
- 3) Only Focusing on a Core Group
- 4) Figuring Out How to Do It
- 5) We're an Island Over Here on the Frontier

The categories are described below:

### Evidence through Data (Evidential-based)

*Evidence through data* refers to the amount, type, and availability of quantitative evidence for substantiation about trends and predictions. Providing evidence of the actual and predicted demographic shifts to academic leaders prior to interviews created an avenue to have a visual perspective and a starting point for the interview to ensue. Clearly, data were critical for

providing common understanding and a systematic, data-informed approach to understanding the issue. A participant commented about the use of the data by sharing it with faculty members:

I showed graphics of the [demographic] changes [to faculty members in my unit] and you see their jaws drop. They say, 'You're making this up!' We are a group of people, scientists that respond to data. You see wheels beginning to turn.

For some academic leaders, it was their first time reviewing the data; it became a starting point for discussion with their respective faculty members. A participant stated:

My faculty are kind and good people. They are also evidential based; they want hard numbers. One of my challenges is to give them that hard number if I can, that is what they need and part of it is understanding the data.

Further, several academic leaders stated the need to have detailed demographic data integrated into future analysis practices by the Office of Institutional Research in order to provide them with a consistent understanding of what the situation is and will be in the future. Importantly, despite the data, some interviewees did not feel that the demographic profile will change as predicted and with the data provided.

### Shared Understanding

The phrase *shared understanding* describes the pendulum of academic leader's awareness about the emerging demographic shifts and its affects in the classrooms. Academic leader's awareness of changes in the demographic student profile was based on (a) teaching general requirement courses that include students from a variety of majors and colleges, (b) minimal contact outside departmental courses and the academic unit, or (c) diverse clothing attire seen on campus. In particular, several academic leaders recognized a growing shift of the student profile as a result of their experiences in the classroom. This compelled them to change their

pedagogical and epistemological perspectives to educate a more globalized-thinking society. A participant stated:

There is obviously going to be a shift toward greater representation of minority groups on campus. There is a growing understanding about the changes and will reflect itself in the way we teach. I'm not sure how the change will affect the rest of the university...it's part of our milieu.

In contrast, few academic leaders consider the percentage of students of color may have nearly reached its peak, or plateau, and question it growing at a higher rate than the state or region. "We don't expect students of color to shift to 30%. Twenty percent is already high and it's not that we have not been attentive." Though aware of the demographic trends, their awareness and work priorities were based on nominal changes in their general student population. A participant stated:

The [historically-underrepresented student numbers] oscillate over the years, oscillating around a small number. What we have seen, which is an important change for me, are the number of women in the [academic unit are] going up. We made focused efforts to get women engaged...I wish I could claim as much success for students of color but I can't.

Lastly, for many academic leaders, support from their supervisor had a critical impact on their awareness of the demographic trends, and played a role to support initiatives, activities, and programs within their academic unit. Several academic leaders stated the need for "higher level, top down" leadership that will strategically increase the importance of educating historically-underrepresented students, which in turn may lead to more emphasis for their colleagues to follow, conform, and feel supported. Why leaders put forth efforts to attract and enroll students of color or shift their ways of thinking and working, however, is situational. For one academic

unit, their initiatives to enroll a greater number of students of color has to do with declining enrollment trends as a result of societal movement influencing their particular profession. At the same time, another academic leader views the field of study and disciplines may result in low wages for all students, which is a deterrent for attracting historically-underrepresented student into the field of study. The participant stated,

I always felt that until the industry was able to put up money to pay people a minimum way, it was incredibly hypocritical for us to find and recruit these students who, if went into [a different occupation] would make at least 50% higher [salary],... would be that much higher plus a potentially better career path for them. We've always had this bind and the reason that there has been a slow development of the kinds of proportions of minorities in the immediate plan that they want is because of their wage structure.

#### Only Focusing on a Core Group

*Only focusing on a core group* appeared as a common theme among the academic leaders as a limitation to diversity related definitions. At the beginning of each interview, clarification was given about the focus of the study on historically-underrepresented students. Throughout the interviews, the academic leaders chose to (a) consider a particular racial population as not historically-underrepresented, (b) reclassify the meaning of under-represented as “historically-underrepresented, white students, from working class backgrounds,” or (c) merge specific racial populations with international students. An interviewee stated, “When I say students of color, when focusing on a core group of students represented in the college, [a particular racial population is] not considered underrepresented students... There are a number of new ethnic minorities developing over time and we need to be aware of their needs, for sure.” Another academic leader stated, “it is just not historically-underrepresented students of color, its

historically-underrepresented, white students, from working class backgrounds.” Further, an academic leader commented, “There were more women and zero minorities. Not enough to notice anything [changing].” Further, several academic leaders described their confusion or challenge for how to academically serve first-generation, new immigrant versus historically-underrepresented students of color. Thus, concerns surfaced by academic leaders about how to empirically categorize the different populations and differing educational needs of groups of students.

Overall, though academic leaders seemed to understand federal definitions about students of color, some chose to redefine students of color to meet their academic and programmatic needs for the academic unit. It became clear in the interviews that University leaders need to learn more about defining student populations while providing the necessary communication and strategies for academic leaders to serve the differing and emerging student populations.

### Figuring Out How to Do It

*Figuring out how to do it* refers to the ability to educate students in an inclusive, multicultural learning environment. Faculty development and renewed training of pedagogies were absent from academic leaders comments unless specifically asked. “Figuring out how to do it before I encourage other people to do it” highlighted the desire for innovative institutional options needed by academic leaders. There seemed to be varied levels of motivation to engage in development or teaching renewal initiatives and convening like-employee groups and existing gathering venues lends to a captured audience and learning environment. Further, there are various types of efforts occurring across campus (e.g., Human Resources, and Equity and Diversity), but their impact or influence across academic leaders calls into question assumptions about traditional academic methods and gaps in curriculum.

Curricular innovations to incorporate social privilege and responsibility, pluralism, and multiculturalism were absent from statements as a core effort in the curriculum or curricular planning. There were, however, curricular modification efforts among academic leaders but the level of strategic work to modify curriculum varies. Academic leaders are (a) actively engaged in strategic curricular reviews, (b) consider multiculturalism and diversity already embedded within their curriculum, (c) have reached barriers or resistance for change from colleagues, or (d) do not see it necessary to make changes. Few academic leaders stated that it was less of a curricular modification need and more of enhancing technological capabilities and options within their instructional practices to meet a new generation of students.

Within one academic unit, multiculturalism was identified as a core phenomenon as a result of the movement within the discipline and traditional research practices. The interviewee stated, "There is an interest in how society addresses a multicultural society in general as a research topic and the way we think about teaching and how it gets reflected on the student body...it is percolating in our curriculum." Another academic unit leader's stated optimism about engaging in a curricular transformation effort, by incorporating specific cultural practices and elements in a string of coursework offerings, will make an impression on students along with faculty. With curricular efforts underway, an interviewee described their efforts as "an experiment...it's exciting." Another interviewee stated, "[The unit] did an analysis of the syllabi and talked with teachers and so-forth. There has been an emphasis for a natural way to create class sessions that raise issues of diversity." This interviewee also iterated talking with students about demographics, but also emphasized the responsibility to reside on the students to become more culturally and ethnically aware. The interviewee stated,

One of the things I do is talk with the students about changing demographics in America.

The students right now will be working 50 years from now....so I can help them to think more about other groups than themselves ... If they don't know very much about it, they better start trying to learn about other cultures in America.

As curricular modifications come to the forefront in some academic units, others continue to struggle for how to make curricular changes or do not see it necessary. An academic leader stated efforts to modify a course name in order to make it attractive to students as a global perspective course; these efforts, however, were derailed by colleagues who did not want to change.

#### We're an Island Over Here on the Frontier

*We're an Island over here on the frontier* was an overarching theme when academic leaders highlighted specific programs and initiatives to serve historically-underrepresented students. Academic leaders consistently commented about being isolated from initiative efforts across campus and without a forum to discuss concerns, programmatic efforts, or share new ideas. For instance, a participant stated:

I think there is potential for collaboration on campus...There are natural barriers...We are sitting in a perfect storm. In some ways, with the economic environment for with it is and the stresses on the college, [it] tends to lead to a bunker mentality...and we have to protect our turf, close the ranks....Talking about collaboration, you have to be confident in yourself or your organization to expose it, take a risk.

As illustrated in the above comment, academic leaders have faced poor outcomes in their efforts and many unit activities were initiated and maintained by a single faculty member. Diligent attempts to recruit students to their unit through national programs, local collaborations and partnerships, and even some faculty initiated efforts were short-lived due to (a) the time intensity

involved to promote and carry out the activity, (b) high costs to keep the program quality sustained, (c) lack of interest on part of the academic unit, (d) little return for their effort, or (e) poor experience and unfortunate outcomes as a result of collaboration or partnership. Academic leaders frequently commented about the need for institutional-level support and resources for these efforts to continued or sustained or even initiated.

As an institution, localized efforts were created over the past several years and continue to be maintained while other units struggle to obtain financial or other support mechanisms to carry out diversity work. Some academic leaders described the need to institutionalize diversity across campus through a hierarchical perspective (top-down effect), which was occurring by support from a supervisor. An interviewee commented about receiving funds to support a person who was dedicated to enhance diversity within their academic unit with the sole purpose to create diversity activities, form mentorship opportunities, and encourage participation by students of color in unit events or offerings. In contrast, a participant stated:

[In order to respond to the academic, programmatic, and social needs of racially and ethnically diverse students], we have to call upon the greater university to assist us in the process. We can't do it alone, especially under these budgetary constraints. We have to look at what services are available throughout the university. We have to look to have our main recruitment and admissions help and our diverse populations bring them in.

Without institutional support in terms of funding sources or other resources, academic units are faced with a challenge to now only recruit students of color but also provide the educational resources, faculty training and development options to educate students with diverse backgrounds. Some academic units have sought institutional support in order to respond to their ability to sustain the initiative as a grant obligation or meet new accreditation standards. Thus,

the pendulum of institutional support for academic units is from their need for a diverse the student body to meet the requirements of accreditation and sustainability provisions.

As academic units carry out their diversity efforts, central administration provides supportive academic programs for students seeking services to enhance academic skills, mentoring options, and socialization outlets. Academic leaders emphasized the importance of the academic programs, but greater cohesion and holistic means is needed rather than operating and acting as separate support units. The awareness of the supportive academic programs existed among participants and these programs are considered an option for students seeking academic services.

## RESULTS

Five categories identified in this study illustrate that there are differences and commonalities between how the academic leader view the impact of the emerging demographic student profile. In this section, the research questions are answered based on the themes that emerged. The results of the study follow:

1. How are academic leaders adapting to the changing student demographics and their potential impact on the instructional or support services they provide?

Academic leaders' adaption to the emerging undergraduate student profile shift involves understanding what information is needed or lacking in order to comprehend the current and future environment on campus. Becoming aware of the trends and having a level of knowledge about the possible impact of the occurrence is necessary in order to adjust or alter ways of doing and thinking in the particular setting (Milliken, 1990). Understanding the historical trends and anticipated predictions of the changing demographic environment, therefore, requires quantitative evidence to develop a common understanding and starting point for discussion

among academic leaders. With certainty, the *scientific* evidence of demographic student information will provide data-informed documentation for their colleagues to consider when addressing pedagogical and scholarly work. In several instances, academic leaders commented their faculty colleagues are not expose to quantitative data or chose to not consider other communications strategies. Hunches or guesses for decision making about academic programs and services for historically-underrepresented students are occurring, but would be more valuable when partnered with statistical trend information.

Making a *case* for altering instructional or support services by academic leaders requires not only comprehending the predictions that will become reality, but also having a shared knowledge about the emerging demographic shifts and their affect in the classrooms. An academic leader commented that “until I know the answers and understand these populations, I can’t make the case.” Currently, the perspective about the possible shifts in the historically-underrepresented student population is based on what the person *sees* or who the person comes *in contact with* internal or external to the academic unit. Further, by perceiving the percentage of students of color may have peaked or rate of change in the student profile will be slow-coming, efforts to accommodate a change will linger at all levels of the institution. Academic leaders, thus, continue to be challenged to make a case for a far-reaching change in the historically-underrepresented student population and its impact on the institution and academic units.

2. What is the role of associate deans, department chairs, and administrative leaders to handle the changes in the university’s student demographic population?

In order for academic leader’s to handle the changes in the university’s historically-underrepresented student profile, it requires them to interpret the situation, predict actions necessary, and strategically plan for the future impact on the unit or institution. In a broad sense,

university leaders are working and making adjustments but academic leaders or their unit faculty members, specifically, run into barriers that negate their ability to move forward. One academic leader stated the following:

Maybe when as more and more students of color come to this university it will become recognized more as part of our job to help those students graduate from this university. We'll provide support for them and become more of a natural way of conducting our business. What I doubt is that faculty think that it is part of their job.

For some academic units, continual efforts by faculty members or unit leaders to recruit students of color result in high cost for the academic unit with few applicants matriculating. Academic programming internal to the unit are considered beneficial if given pointed attention by faculty or mentorship options, paid student work or leadership opportunities within the unit, and or scholarship or stipend awards provided as a result of service and engagement back to the community. Academic leaders support faculty members' work or their personal efforts, as time permits or on their own time, to support the shifting undergraduate student profile. On a broad spectrum, academic leaders' frustrations and agitation are evident across the units, but anticipation for the new or emerging challenges ahead exists for several leaders.

Though university leaders define historically-underrepresented students and other diversities based on federal definitions, academic leaders educating and serving historically-underrepresented student populations consider or select specific groups as those requiring specific services or needs. An academic leader stated, "It is just not historically-underrepresented students of color, its historically-underrepresented, white students, from working class backgrounds." Changing the meaning about what groups are considered historically-underrepresented or the attributes for diversity and who is impacted depends on the academic

unit. Apparent confusion exists from academic leaders about *if* and *what types* of services are needed for historically-underrepresented versus first generation immigrant students and also international students versus students of color. To address this uncertainty, redefining students of color or focusing their efforts to gender groups or socioeconomic status is an avenue for academic leaders to predict a future profile and conceptualize current efforts and future priorities.

3. What response is needed by associate deans, department chairs, and administrative leaders to support a future profile of university students?

Academic leader's response to the emerging historically-underrepresented student profile is based on their perceived need to act on new instructional and student service opportunities or challenges. Actions and developing possible strategies to respond to meeting the institution's strategic goals are a result of academic leaders gaining new knowledge about the situation. Academic leader's initiatives to consider new pedagogies, scholarship options, and recruitment initiatives are strong evidence about their efforts to consider and put into action efforts that would create greater diversity within their academic unit. For some academic leaders, past collaborations and programmatic efforts proved unrewarding and a disappointment. There are other academic leaders who are taking up new efforts, though on an individual basis, to slowly educate their faculty members about the changing demographics, offer courses that include diversity discussions, or create research projects and mentorship opportunities students at all levels (including high school) as a way to engage students in a diverse manner. Few academic units, however, are strategically preparing for the future student profile through a calculated approach, but their actions to make a difference signal their perceived need to strategically think about the future student profile.

Academic leader's emphasized that institutional support is required as the primary foundation, along with university-level leadership as champions, for accommodating, educating, and supporting increasingly diverse student populations. For some academic leaders, their immediate supervisor was the driver behind their efforts, while others sought the motivation, resources, and information from university-level leadership. In particular, a budgetary response to support programs and their other unit efforts are critical since many feel isolated or inconsequential to the larger university strategic diversity work. From technology resources to personnel to program and services, fiduciary needs were identified as critical for addressing their efforts and movement toward strategically addressing the future diverse student body. Further, through faculty renewal and development opportunities for academic leaders, specific pedagogical, instructional, and collaboration strategies are available, on a limited basis, to attend. As a critical resource to academic leaders and their unit faculty members, the means to participate and the rewards for attending are minimal. Without institutional support, academic leaders are challenged to move forward to make a greater impact and strategic effort to act on the emerging shift in demographics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As described in the themes, we developed a conceptual way to group suggested recommendation: (a) awareness building, (b) skill building, and (c) institutional balance. The following suggestions are based on the categories identified in this study:

### Awareness Building

Consistently throughout the study, academic leaders expressed the need to be aware of and acquire information about current trends and predictions about the emerging historically-underrepresented student profile. Academic leaders need to acquire agreement about the issue or

problem about diversity, along with developing an understanding of the concepts, its meaning and impact, and their purposeful role to meet the possible social and pedagogical shifts in the community and classroom. Further, their awareness about historically-underrepresented populations requires clarity in diversity-related definitions, including differences between immigrant, new immigrant, and international students. Building awareness about historically-underrepresented populations and understanding the impact it may have beyond the classroom strengthens the awareness about the projected shift in the undergraduate student demographic profile.

Throughout the study, academic leaders provided suggestions about how to address the emerging shift in the student profile or their efforts to be prepared for the change if necessary. Review of the literature and conversations with diversity leaders throughout the country led to several approaches to address this issue. Below are some key suggested approaches:

- a) Become data-informed through sharing of data and resources across the institution and within academic units and knowing how well students are doing, what they say about their experiences and at what rates they progress and graduate.
- b) Dialogue in an open and safe environment to explore questions as a means to reduce biases and stereotypes. For example, at Ferris State University, the dean holds weekly brunches with faculty to discuss shared readings on diversity-related topics.
- c) Grant time and focused study to dialogue with peers and investigate a particular area of focus (Musil, 2000). “If we...ignore where people are at and where they are coming from, we drastically diminish the potential power of education” (Beckham, 2008, p. 12).

- d) Provide release time to serve as faculty diversity coordinator to recruit small groups of colleagues to work on diversity issues and organize academic unit-wide faculty forums to brainstorm new directions.
- e) Develop mentoring or matching up academic leaders with other faculty or external community members to offer an alternative way to increase diversity awareness, knowledge, and skill-building by the development of a professional relationship.
- f) Create an environment for faculty to convene to discuss current practices, programs, and initiatives for supporting, recruiting and or educating students.

### Skill Building

Training, professional development, and faculty programming were absent in the interviews. Though academic leaders emphasized curriculum challenges and integration of multicultural efforts as strategic work within their unit, developing as a faculty member was inconspicuously absent. The central issue resides about (a) fostering educational creativity and innovation in teaching, curriculum, intercultural understanding, and civic dialogue, (b) transforming or redesigning curriculum by examining not only the courses but reconsider teaching techniques and also textbooks and readings that include diversity related issues or topic (Musil, 2000), and (c) strengthening existing campus communities to allow for greater opportunities for collaborations and discussions. With the enhancement, development, and renewal of academic leaders' and other employees' skills, it further strengthens the institution's capacity for educating students to be prepared for the diverse global society.

Several approaches to strengthen academic leaders' professional development and renewal are identified below. These suggestions have been identified as practices at numerous institutions across the country.

- a) Offer a series of pedagogical, community engagement, and accountability seminars to assist academic leaders in their own transformation along with creating and innovating courses, developing sustainable activities, and engaging in research initiatives that are inclusive of diversity and encourages reflection. This effort should align with reimagining of institutional diversity initiatives ([http://www.academic.umn.edu/equity/pdf/ReimaginingED\\_Dec2009.pdf](http://www.academic.umn.edu/equity/pdf/ReimaginingED_Dec2009.pdf)).
- b) Make available professional development collaborations between academic and student affairs departments (i.e., sponsoring seminars or research projects) that allow academic leaders and staff the opportunity to work together over a period of time (e.g., one semester) on issues of diversity, globalization, local and global connections, student-centered pedagogies, and transformative education. This practice is a model from the New Jersey Campus Diversity Initiative.
- c) Identify and convene pre-existing groups to focus on diversity related issues.
- d) Broaden and strengthen academic leaders' connections with the institution's teaching and learning department. This could be accomplished by the following:
  1. Meet the needs of academic leaders based on where they are by regularly engaging them in discussions. This could be occur by convening focus groups on a regular basis to discuss issues of diversity not only in academic programs and in the classroom, but also in co-curricular experiences and service programs (Beckham, 2008)
  2. Provide training focused on faculty development and renewal of pedagogy as it specifically relates to diversity and identified measureable outcomes.

3. Develop an academic leader or faculty seminar that meets between 3 days or a course of 5 weeks to discuss diversity related topics and teaching techniques.
4. Strategically, and in combination with other efforts, offer guest speaker appearances in conjunction with focused topical discussions, such as Gathering the Tools at Emory University.

#### Institutional Balance

Across the institution, academic and programmatic activities and initiatives have occurred by small groups of academic leaders or individual faculty members. Many of these activities have revolved around recruitment and retention of diverse students. For example, an academic unit participated in a national effort to recruit historically-underrepresented students and then chose to engage locally in this effort due to financial challenges and low student matriculation to the University. Other initiatives focused on scholarly or research efforts as a means to recruit historically-underrepresented students. For instance, an academic unit provided an opportunity for up to four University students and two high school students to team together in a research project with a faculty member. Through fundraising and innovative student research efforts by a faculty member within an academic unit, this initiative occurred while funds and faculty time were available. However, similar to recruitment efforts, focused research initiatives did not broadly impact the greater student population. Knowing about these examples of activities may strength institutional efforts to support and broaden the work to other parts of the campus through collaborations or funding resources.

In all, there needs to be an acquired and ever-widening support from the institution to sustain academic efforts such as those described above. To do all this, it requires a considerable group of academic leaders and faculty members to understand the emerging shifts in the diversity

of the University's student profile. It necessitates the institution to foster an understanding of the changing demographics as documented in writing, communicated through data information, and rendered into action.

As discussed in interviews, with national diversity leaders, and described in scholarly resources, there are three primary suggested strategies to consider for creating a balanced environment that works toward a university embracing diversity in all aspects of work and efforts. The suggestions are as follows:

- a. Communicate information, empirical facts, and anecdotal stories about diversity programs, initiatives and research. Providing opportunities and initiatives for academic leaders and other faculty members to engage in professional development should enhance their knowledge of diversity erudition.
- b. Use communication strategies in various venues to articulate the dependence of their work on larger support for a powerful strategy to conjure institutional support. "Writing compelling stories for various constituencies to communicate the educational and societal value of diversity to their institutions" (Knox, 2005).
- c. Consistent assessment and evaluation of initiatives and efforts to allow for the formulation and implementation of concrete actions in order to grow and evolve.

Overall, awareness building, skills building, and institutional balance are categories that include several suggestions for future action to support the needs of academic leader and also the institution's diversity vision and activities. Without careful consideration of the dichotomous understanding about the emerging shifts in the high school graduate population in the Midwestern region, academic and support service planning for a different type of undergraduate population for the future could be delayed. The academic leaders' knowledge about the emerging

shift in the demographic student profile would be strengthened if transformation within the institution occurs. This involves creating an institutional environment that inclusively supports and embraces a diversity of students outside and inside the classrooms.

#### FUTURE ACTION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This study proceeded from the perspective of researchers at a public university who are immersed in the field of institutional research. We identified an emerging issue that was evident through national, regional, and state data information. Data evidence consistently showed trends and predictions toward a shift in the historically-underrepresented population geographically across all sectors of the nation. At Western and Southern regions of the country, demographic student population shifts occurred not only across the state but also at higher education institutions. The Midwestern region, however, is on the border for change in regards to its demographic population of students graduating from high school. With a greater number of racially and ethnically diverse students graduating from high school *and* an overall fewer number of students graduating from high schools, it calls into question for postsecondary education leaders to not only be attentive of the fewer numbers of students available for higher education, but also the their preparedness for and financial resources for those potential applicants to enroll at an institution. This is based on quantitative predications, but it is uncertain how inclusive the University will simulate the predications in order to make sustainable shifts in the way the academic and administrative leaders address the probable change in the undergraduate student profile.

Evidence about the demographic population shift was provided to the participants in the study by Institutional Research, and the dichotomy of their understanding and strategic preparation or action throughout the public university is evident. Consistently, data provided to

the academic leaders was a critical visual tool for them, as many referred to themselves as “scientists” requiring “evidence” in order to instill an understanding about the trends and predictions. Sharing the data information broadly to their faculty colleagues was deemed important by them to assist in understanding the possible shifts in the undergraduate profile. (Distributing the information broadly to their colleagues was not a request by the researchers.) Even so, skepticism exists by several academic leaders. Their tremendous efforts to enhance the units' student diversity profile had been faltered by high expense with little results for their past efforts. Further, in view of change occurring gradually over time at the institution, many academic leaders expect the demographic shifts to be slow coming in the future, if at all. Repeatedly, academic leaders asked for data information as evidence as an ongoing tool as a basis for understanding the movement within the student profile, which may ultimately be a resource for strategically planning and taking action as necessary now and into the future.

Going forward, Institutional Research at the University has been positioned itself over the past few years to provide demographic resources within its Institutional Planning Profiles (found at <http://www.irr.umn.edu/profiles/>). As an annual planning tool for academic leaders at the institutional and collegiate levels, refinement of the demographic information presented within the Profiles will be a critical effort to support the planning needs of academic leaders. Overall, Institutional Research has created these Profiles to be didactic and dynamic to include necessary information for institutional leaders to utilize during their planning and decision-making activities.

As a result of this study, there are three future studies to consider about demographics shifts at the Midwestern institution. These studies include: (a) With the general understanding about the academic perspective and experiences as identified in the current study, seeking an

understanding about *why* applicants chose to attend a different postsecondary institution other than the particular Midwestern University would provide a perspective about demographic choice and movement, (b) Gaining insight into the types of services and programs offered to students of color and why some services and programs are more impactful on student progress and graduation over others would provide important insights for University and academic leaders, and (c) Analyses about the possible impact for academic leaders of the emerging trends for first generation *and* new immigrant students would provide a perspective about how to adapt to and handle this fast-growing population of undergraduate students. Through research collaborations between the offices of Equity and Diversity and Institutional Research, future research endeavors and the application of suggested recommendations may become an informative means for preparing for the future and advancing the university's academic excellence.

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