

## REVIEW OF FORMALLY ORGANIZED UNITS

### Units Concerning Retention of Undergraduate Students from Underrepresented Groups

There are many retention initiatives at UIC that involve multiple strategies and campus units in a comprehensive effort to retain all students who matriculate at UIC. Four campus units specifically target underrepresented undergraduates in their retention efforts. Three of these serve undergraduates in all colleges: the African-American Academic Network, the Latin American Recruitment and Education Services, and the Native American Support Program. In addition, the College of Engineering has a unit that addresses recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups in Engineering --the Minority Engineering Recruitment and Retention Program (MERP).

#### African American Academic Network (AAAN)

##### Mission

The African American Academic Network's (AAAN) charge is to recruit and enroll African American students and to provide academic and developmental support from admission to graduation. AAAN offers a broad range of services including: admissions assistance, personal growth and development, academic advisement, academic support and co-curricular activities which enhance the cultural, academic and social experiences of African American students. The program encourages students to bond with UIC by providing a supportive, welcoming environment that helps them to remain at UIC through graduation.

##### Retention Data

Total African American enrollments at UIC have dropped slightly from 2,459 (10%) in Fall 95 to 2,272 (9.3%) in Fall 99. The Fall 99 enrollment figure for African American undergraduates is 1,587 which is 9.8% of the undergraduate student body (Table 13). The number of African American beginning freshmen continues to fluctuate as it has since 1993 (Table 14). For the Fall 1999 semester, there were 254 African American freshmen. Of these students, 90% met the standard admission criteria; 26 students (10%) were admitted under AAAN's admissions assistance program. The six-year graduation rate of the 1994 entering cohort of African American students was 21.7% with 6% still enrolled. The rate for all students entering in 1994 is 35.6% with 8.4% still enrolled.

Despite the decrease in the number of African American students at UIC, the number of African American students who graduate has increased. In FY 95, UIC granted 224 baccalaureate degrees to African American students. There was a gradual increase to 246 in FY 99 (Table 15). This is indicative of the impact of retention efforts targeting African American students. Although AAAN is

UIC ranked 48<sup>th</sup> (excluding HBCs) in granting baccalaureate degrees to African Americans (*Black Issues in Higher Education*, July 8, 1999, pp. 46-81).

Although AAAN is committed to serving all African American undergraduates, approximately 80% of incoming African-American students sign an advising agreement with AAAN. This agreement outlines program services and student expectations. In AY99-00 205 of the 254 entering students signed contracts. Of the 1,694 African-American undergraduates enrolled in Fall 1999, 94% opted to be in AAAN (Table 16).

##### Retention Staff and Strategies

AAAN has a staff 20 (12 FTE). They devote 10.15 FTE to retention-related activities for UIC African American students.

The retention efforts of AAAN are driven by research findings that show retention of students through the first 60 hours of university study to be critical to persist to graduation. For that reason, AAAN targets students in their initial years at UIC. In addition to regularly admitted students, AAAN also targets students who have been admitted through special action. Special action admission indicates some weaknesses in

the student's preparation for university study. The final group served consists of continuing students on academic probation.

All African American students receive an introduction to AAAN during summer orientation. Orientation programs are provided for both new freshmen and transfer students. AAAN participates in these orientation programs and assists in advising students. AAAN asks all African American students to sign an advising contract. Under this contract, students agree to see their assigned advisor two times a month. This is a voluntary commitment on the part of regularly admitted students but is a condition of acceptance for students entering via special action. The vast majority of regularly admitted students sign these contracts.

AAAN has developed a new program, the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) which begins at orientation when students choose their classes. Under this program, AAAN has identified critical cores courses and developed parallel study groups for selected sections of these courses. African American students are encouraged to register for these course sections in order to participate in these study groups. These study groups not only serve an academic support function but also provide critical bonds to the University community. These two goals are served by the use of an academic tutor who assists students with content and conceptual issues and an advanced undergraduate student who serves as a study group leader and provides a role model.

New Learning Assistance Program groups African American students in core courses with matching study groups.

AAAN requires African American students admitted through special action to attend a Summer Bridge program which is given by the UIC TRIO program. Successful participants may earn college credit in mathematics and the first required English composition course prior to fall semester. The impact of this program is considerable.

Once classes begin, all African American students are invited to an open house at AAAN. This event helps solidify the connection of African American students to AAAN and to others in the university community. At this point, students may sign up for a mentor. Through the AAAN mentoring

Mentoring program key to integration of African American students into the University.

program, entering students are paired with advanced students with similar majors. AAAN schedules at least 2 social activities per month. Although these activities are not restricted to students in the mentoring program, one planned function of these activities is to give mentors and proteges a chance to interact. These activities are often developed around a theme such as financial management, time management, etc. This allows the mentor-pairs to discuss issues critical to success. Approximately 60 pairs of students participate in this program each year.

Two core retention activities of the AAAN staff are academic advising and academic skills courses. The Academic Skills courses are offered in conjunction with the Center for Academic Excellence. These courses focus on basic study skills, writing skills, time management, etc. Students are shepherded into these courses if advisors see weakness either in their high school preparation or on placement tests.

A great deal of staff time is devoted to individual advising sessions. Many of these interactions are part of the "contracts" students sign at Orientation. Over the past few years, more advising on concrete issues has moved to e-mail. Through the use of e-mail, students can get rapid response to vexing questions without having to make an appointment with their advisor. Both students and staff are delighted with this new mode of communication.

To make AAAN staff more accessible, AAAN now offers service at a high traffic spot in the student union (Chicago Circle Center) in the middle of the day on one day a week.

In addition to individual advising and tutoring, AAAN maintains a Study Center. Tutoring is available both by appointment and on a walk-in basis at the center. One major improvement made in the Center this past year was the installation of a computer room that gives students computer access. This draws many students to the Study Center. In addition to tutoring and computer access, the Study Center provides a quiet place to study and is devoted to open study for final exam preparation.

New computer room available to students in AAAN Study Center.

Communication with students is critical. For that reason, AAAN instituted a listserv for all participating students. Via this listserv, AAAN announces all upcoming activities and reminds students of critical dates. These dates include registration for classes, drop deadlines, scholarship and financial aid deadlines. AAAN also publishes a paper newsletter called the Networker twice a semester. This publication has articles of student interest and articles written by students. In addition, a section of the Networker celebrates the outstanding achievements of African American students at UIC.

New AAAN student listserv provides critical communication link to students.

Another resource provided by AAAN that as a retention tool is the "African American Student Survival Guide." This handbook lays out important information and contacts that will help students navigate a large and complex university.

AAAN offers a series of workshops that are designed to enhance the probability of academic success. These include a computer literacy workshop which has proved to be invaluable to incoming African American students many of whom have had little computer access in high school. Research skills, especially library skills, are other important workshop topics.

Since having a goal for one's academic career makes the work more meaningful, AAAN also offers programs that link current study to later career goals. AAAN offers seminars on how to prepare for graduate study and Graduate Record Exams, and maintains a Career Library with current magazines, newspapers, and other resource materials on occupations/professions.. In concert with other campus units, AAAN has helped develop a Summer program for second-year students that are interested in careers in the health sciences. This program is designed to familiarize students with these professions and to assist them in defining the courses they should take as undergraduates. Through the Minority Teacher Initiative, AAAN in partnership with the College of Education allows students to spend time with teachers in classrooms to see if this is the career for them.

#### Assessment/Reorganization

AAAN is currently in a transition period. The former director left in January of 2000 and the new Director will take over in Fall 2000. The new Director will undoubtedly review the goals and actions of the program and may well reorganize and reorient the program.

#### Other Goals

Retention is only part of the mission of AAAN. The other part of the mission is recruitment. The recruitment activities of AAAN were described in the 1998 report.

#### **Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES)**

The Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES) is a comprehensive program involved in recruitment, retention, and special opportunity initiatives. This review will focus on the retention aspect of the program.

## Mission

The stated mission of LARES is “to empower students by providing personal growth and educational opportunities to prepare leaders who will make individual and collective contributions toward the cultural and social advancement of the Latino community.” To achieve this goal it is critical to support and retain Latino undergraduates who come to UIC.

## Retention Data

The six-year graduation rate of the Fall 1994 Latino cohort at UIC is 30.4% with 10.4% still enrolled. The graduation rate is only slightly lower than the rate for the total cohort – 35.6% with 8.4% still enrolled. Another measure of LARES’ success is number of degrees awarded (Table 15). UIC awards more bachelor’s degrees to Latinos than any other major university in the Midwest and 31<sup>th</sup> in the nation (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, <http://www.hispanicoutlook.com/top100.html>). In 1995, the percent was 10.8 and it has increased in each subsequent year. In 1999, Latino students received 14 percent of the baccalaureate degrees awarded by UIC.

UIC ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the Nation in number of baccalaureate degrees granted to Latinos (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, <http://www.hispanicoutlook.com/top100.html>).

## Retention Staff and Strategies

LARES has a staff of twelve who devote approximately 5.65 FTE to retention efforts. In addition to administrative staff and counselors/recruiters, the Program employs one full-time Academic Skills Specialist and one part-time lecturer who devote all of their time to academic support. Similar to other retention programs, these LARES staff members devote considerable time to one-on-one advising. With one-on-one advising, retention initiatives are more labor intensive than are recruitment activities that can address larger numbers at one time. The number of students enrolled in LARES has shown a steady increase from 2,506 in Fall 1995 to 2,626 in Fall 1999 (Table 16).

Two principles drive the LARES retention strategy: the first is that strong bonds to the university community enhance retention, and second that financial concerns are critical to continued attendance. The various services and activities described below flow from these initial principles.

During the admissions process Latino students who straddle the admission criteria of the campus are identified and routed through the LARES Summer Bridge program. The academic portion of the program helps students transition from a high school to a college-level curriculum. The six-week course of instruction seeks to enhance the student’s math and writing skills while introducing them to the resources of the campus. In the summer of 1999 the LARES Summer Bridge program enrolled 99 students.

Latino students have traditionally come from families where access to educational or financial opportunities have been severely limited. For that reason, LARES retention efforts begin prior to the first day of class. LARES participates in campus orientation programs when students are introduced to LARES and other university services and informed of their match with a LARES counselor. This counselor will advise a LARES student throughout his/her undergraduate career. By providing detailed orientation information on a more personal basis, the student will begin the process of personal development and be integrated into the campus community.

Once the academic year begins, LARES offers two major activities targeting retention of Latino students. These two activities are academic skills classes and academic advising. The academic skills classes offered by LARES are designed to teach students to examine, analyze, evaluate and write at an advanced level. As such, these courses concentrate on techniques for approaching reading and writing from a critical and active perspective. Students process and represent their ideas using a variety of writing formats. Subject material often integrates major Latino literary figures. Academic Skills Program Math courses are taught

with a focus on learning math concepts while conditioning students to adopt a systematic approach to the study of mathematics. A recent study of the impact of this math skills class has documented the positive impact of this course.

LARES academic counseling is handled by counselors who represent a wide range of academic expertise. Advisors specialize in the following high demand areas: Elementary and Secondary Education, Pre-Law, Health Careers and Nursing. This year LARES counselors have increased the use of e-mail to address student's immediate needs. Easy access and immediacy are highly valued by the students in LARES. In Fall 1999, LARES distributed a new publication, *Bienvenidos*, which is a resource guide for Latino students. This handbook is intended to make navigation of the University simpler and more transparent.

New publication, *Bienvenidos*, serves as a resource guide for Latino students at UIC.

One critical piece in the retention puzzle is economic. LARES has worked hard to provide information concerning sources of financial aid and has encouraged applications for various scholarships targeting Latino students. LARES regularly offers financial aid and scholarship workshops for both students and their parents. UIC Latino students receive the largest number of Hispanic scholarship awards in the Midwest. This year LARES has nominated 11 students for the new Gates Millennium Scholars Program. Financial support available through the President's Award Program (PAP) is viewed as critical to LARES' recruitment and retention efforts. The PAP was established in 1985 under the leadership of the President of the University of Illinois. The purpose of this program is to ensure that capable underrepresented minorities with outstanding academic records can study at the University.

UIC Latino students receive the largest number of Hispanic Scholarship Awards in the Midwest.

The importance of strong ties to the UIC community has led LARES to assist in the organization of Latino student groups and to provide support once established. There are currently over 20 Latino student groups. These student groups have organized many events and activities that celebrate Latino culture and provide a venue for Latino students to interact. The largest of these events is Latino Fest which draws participants not only from UIC but from the Chicago Latino community. Strong ties to families are also important. For that reason, LARES has encouraged parental involvement throughout the student's career at UIC and created the Association of Latino Parents.

### Efficiency

As the numbers of Latino students burgeoned over the last decade from 8.7% of the total campus student body to 13.6% in 1999, the staff size and budget increased but not dramatically. Currently, the program cost per student is approximately \$189. Compared with similar programs, LARES is low in cost.

### Innovation

LARES has been an innovator, initiating or participating in many retention programs that have later been adopted by other support groups and colleges. Some of the recent innovations are Workshops for Latinas with Children, *Bienvenidos* (A Handbook for Success at UIC), a parent group, a summer program for second-year students interested in medical careers, scholarship and financial aid workshops for students and their parents, and graduate school/career workshops.

### Assessment

The sizeable Latino student representation at UIC gives evidence of LARES' success. Almost one of every three Latino students who attends a four-year public institution in Illinois attends UIC (1998 IBHE Underrepresented Report). The number of degrees conferred on Latinos is also evidence of the quality programs offered by LARES. LARES staff welcome assessment of their programs and have been responsive to changes suggested by such assessments.

## Other Goals

This review has focused on the retention activities of LARES. Any such focused review is incomplete without mention of the success of LARES in recruiting Latino students to UIC with a special emphasis on family and community involvement. (See FY1999 Annual Report for a review of LARES' recruitment activities.)

## **Minority Engineering Recruitment and Retention Program (MERRP)**

### Mission

The stated mission of the Minority Engineering Recruitment and Retention Program (MERRP) is to promote academic excellence among African American, Latino, and Native American engineering students at UIC. MERRP is a college-based academic program designed to prepare students for a variety of career opportunities in the engineering profession, including design, production, development, management and construction.

### Retention Data

One indicator of the success of MERRP's retention activities, is the retention rate of underrepresented minority students from first to second year. Retention from the first-year to the second is reportedly critical. Retention rates for both African American and Latino entering freshmen have generally increased each of the last five years. In both cases, the retention rates for Fall 1998 entering freshmen are impressive. The African American retention rate is 70.8 and the Latino rate is 78.1. The true meaning of these figures is apparent only when compared to the retention rate for Caucasian students, 75.9. The efforts of MERRP are part of the explanation for these high retention figures.

One-year retention of Latino Engineering New Freshman (78.1) exceeds that of Caucasian students (75.9).

### Retention Staff and Strategies

MERRP has a staff of four full-time and five part-time staff. Staff devote approximately 75% of their time to retention efforts.

MERRP has developed a comprehensive program designed to increase the enrollment and graduation of historically underrepresented ethnic minority students. Admitted students and their parents are invited to participate in an orientation program designed to familiarize them with the rigors of the Engineering major. In the summer prior to entry, students participate in a six-week pre-college residential program emphasizing mathematics fundamentals, science concepts, and an English composition courses. MERRP clusters minority freshman students in mathematics, chemistry, and physics courses to the extent possible to promote group study and mutual support. These courses and some Engineering courses are paired with supplemental instruction sessions. Supplemental Instruction (SI) is one of the most effective efforts provided by MERRP. SI is not a traditional approach to tutoring; rather, it employs graduate teaching assistants and advanced undergraduate students who work as instructors under supervision. Recently, alumni of the program have taken time from their jobs to act as instructors and role models in SI sessions.

Supplemental Instruction in core areas is key to minority student success in Engineering program.

MERRP also employs video technology and computer instruction through the Science and Math Academic Review Techniques (SMART) Project to increase the number of contact hours MERRP students have in academic instruction. By using SMART materials, students study at their own rate and can review difficult material more frequently through interactive computer instruction and replaying video tapes.

MERRP students actively participate in the Breakfast With an Engineer, Shadow An Engineer, and Corporate Day programs with industry leaders from many firms including Lucent Technologies, Nicor Gas, Argonne National Laboratories, FermiLab, and Motorola. MERRP provides internship opportunities through its Minority Engineering Advisory Board, President's Leadership Program, and Co-operative Education offices. Emerging Leaders in Technology and Engineering (ELITE) allows freshmen and transfer students to receive peer mentoring experiences through the assistance of advanced students. Students are actively involved in professional societies such as the National Society of Black Engineers, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and the Society of Women Engineers.

Contact with engineering professionals and mentoring by advanced students increases retention of underrepresented students in Engineering.

One other essential piece of this program is financial. The College of Engineering has been successful in obtaining substantial scholarship support. This support enables students to concentrate on their academic work rather than worrying about how they will pay for the next semester.

### Efficiency

State and campus funds allocated to this program have allowed the program staff to leverage critical external scholarship funds from major corporations such as BP-Amoco, ComEd, FermiLab, Fluor Foundation, Honeywell, MIDCON, Motorola, Nicor Gas, Northrop and Raytheon. MERRP pre-college programs have also been self-supporting through grants from public and private sources.

### Innovation

Although many of the practices are not new, their application in this setting and their characteristics are unique. The Supplemental Instruction program detailed above is critical to early success. The incorporation of peers and alums as group leaders enhances the impact of this program by providing role models for new and transfer students. Encouragement of active participation in the various programs that allow students to meet and interact with current professionals in their field is a key piece in the overall retention plan.

### Assessment

The MERRP is a successful program with practices that have been demonstrated to have considerable impact on performance. For example, MERRP students who attend Supplemental Instruction sessions perform significantly better in their regular classes – one grade higher – than MERRP students who do not attend. This and other measures of student retention are reviewed regularly and used to guide decisions concerning current initiatives and development of new strategies.

## **Native American Support Program (NASP)**

### Mission

Established in 1970, the Native American Support Program (NASP) provides support services to Native American students wishing to enroll and attend UIC. NASP is the first and only academic support program for Native American students at an Illinois public university that offers baccalaureate, graduate and doctoral degree programs. NASP begins support for Native American students prior to entrance to UIC by providing assistance with applications to UIC, with financial aid applications, and with tribal scholarship applications. Support continues through the enrollment process. After students enter UIC, NASP's focus shifts to retention issues.

### Retention Data

Native American enrollments have remained stable at 0.3% for the past decade (Table 12). Total Native American enrollments at UIC during this period have never reached 100. Considering the relatively small

numbers of Native American students, retention figures fluctuate. For example, 78% of the Native American students enrolled in AY97-98 were retained to AY98-99. The percentage dropped to 62% retained from AY98-99 to AY99-00.

### Retention Staff and Strategies

NASP has a staff of 3. Just over 1.5 FTE staff are devoted to retention related efforts. Most of the work done with students is on a one-to-one basis. Since inadequate preparation is a frequent problem faced by Native American students, staff devote considerable time to tutoring and referring students to various academic support services as UIC. One important strategy for increasing performance is to provide students with a peer mentor who is a more advanced student. The staff counsel students to attend the various student development seminars offered by other support programs and the Academic Center for Excellence.

One especially significant support service provided by NASP is the monthly gathering of students. At this gathering, students and staff discuss national and local issues of importance to Native Americans. Considerable time is also spent on sharing information on Native American cultural heritage. These gatherings provide peer support and allow students to learn of educational opportunities, job openings, and scholarship opportunities.

Financial need is one of the greatest barriers to the retention of Native American students. This is due, in part, to a cultural background that is not comfortable with indebtedness. NASP staff try to educate students about average educational debt as well as referring them to experts in the Office of Financial Aid. Staff also devote considerable time to assisting students in obtaining financial assistance, especially from tribal and other sources targeted at Native American students.

### Innovation

NASP devotes considerable time to the community. Staff focus on developing strong relationships and a high profile in the various Native American groups. Participation in the cultural activities provide staff a means of connecting with and supporting students in the program. Linking students to their cultural heritage is critical to their self esteem and critical to their success.