

## Focus Topics

### Work Force Experiences and Opportunities for Students from Underrepresented Groups

*Partnerships with External Employers to Offer Internships for Students from Underrepresented Groups.* Project Minority Student Support for Teaching (MSS) is designed to increase the pool of minorities who teach in the Springfield and Decatur school systems. It provides a teacher incentive program, including paid tuition at UIS and Lincoln Land or Richland Community College, for local students beginning at the junior year of high school and continuing through certification. Students receive exposure to the teaching profession through completion of an increasingly sophisticated internship at each phase of the project, culminating in a paid internship in the school districts as students prepare for certification. Although only one graduate has done so, students are encouraged to work in either the Decatur or the Springfield public schools upon graduation. The project had 12 students enrolled at UIS during AY98-99, the last year for which data are available. Two graduated, bringing the total number of UIS graduates to seven. Another 12 students are enrolled in junior college. (A unit review of MSS is included later in the report.)

*Tech-Prep Programs.* As an upper-level institution at this time, UIS does not offer tech-prep programs.

*Programs or Activities for Placement of Students from Underrepresented Groups.* UIS has no dedicated programs or activities that facilitate placement of students from underrepresented groups. The Women's Center and the Office of Minority Student Affairs, however, provide informal networking assistance to these students. In addition, the Office of Disability Services sends all interested students to the state's Office of Rehabilitation Services for placement. ORS has a staff member who places graduates in state jobs according to their ability levels.

*Effective Work Force Experiences and Opportunities for Students from Under-represented Groups.* Since its inception as Sangamon State University, the campus has placed high value on work force experiences – so much so that an applied study term (AST) was at one point a requirement for a baccalaureate degree from SSU. The AST remains one of three options today that students can choose to fulfill their upper-level general education requirements. Seminars that are a required component of the AST explore career education, cultural diversity, public affairs, the application of theory to practice, self-directed learning, and personal growth/skills. The applied study term program serves all students.

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Financial support is often an important concern for members of underrepresented groups. For nine consecutive years UIS has been able to offer paid internships to baccalaureate students through Cooperative Work Study Grants. Although this opportunity is available to all students, UIS includes a special objective in the grant to place minority students, women students, and students with disabilities in the internships. AST faculty recruit members of targeted groups to these opportunities by posting placement notices in the Office of Minority Student Affairs, the Office of Disability Services, and the Women's Center. AST faculty also address student groups, such as the Minority Leadership in Public Service Program and the Organization of Latin American Students, to increase awareness of the opportunities. These efforts are apparently successful since 75% of the interns in AY99-00 were women, compared to 60% of all undergraduate students, while 18% were minority (all ethnic classifications), compared to 11% of all undergraduate students. The grant award for AY00-01 is \$95,000 (approximately 80 placements), up from \$65,000 (58 placements) in AY99-00.

In addition, four UIS students participated in the Summer Research Opportunities Program at UIUC during the summer of 2000. This program invites minority undergraduates to apply for a summer program designed to

prepare them for graduate study and faculty careers. Special educational enrichment activities are part of the program.

*Effectiveness of Practices and Activities.* UIS believes that its internship programs at both the baccalaureate level and the graduate level, available to all students, are among the finest of their kind in the state. Nonetheless, the campus continually works to improve the number, type, and depth of these experiences. Administrators, for example, are now negotiating to establish baccalaureate-level internships with the Illinois State Legislature.

### **Meeting the Needs of All Students**

*Social, Cultural, and Recreational Opportunities for Members of Underrepresented Groups.* UIS had 43 registered student organizations in FY00. Seven (16%) of these organizations were dedicated to providing social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for women, African Americans, Hispanics, and students with disabilities:

- Women's Issues Caucus
- African-American Student Organization, African-American Studies Club, Black Writers Forum, Sankofa
- Organization of Latin American Students
- Delta Sigma Omicron (students with disabilities)

Asian and Asian-American students from China, Korea, and Thailand are served by an additional three organizations, and the International Students Organization serves the growing population of foreign students on campus.

In all, 11 of the campus' 43 (26%) organizations provided social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for members of underrepresented groups and other international students. This is nearly double the proportion of the student body (14%) represented by these groups. The activities of these 11 organizations, which are similar in scope to those of any college campus, bring to UIS a wealth of understanding of the diverse nature of the world's population.

One of the most significant barriers to successful social, cultural, and recreational opportunities for students from underrepresented groups (indeed, for all students at UIS) has been the nontraditional nature of UIS' clientele. Nontraditional students – generally older students who attend school part time due to family and/or career commitments – are not likely to participate in student- or campus-sponsored events. The trend at UIS over the past few years, however, has been toward an increase in the number of full-time residential students of a more traditional college age. In addition, the initiation of the Capital Scholars Program in Fall 2001 will bring a critical mass of traditional four-year college students to campus. Staff in the Division of Student Affairs and faculty have been working intensively to plan for strengthening the quality of student life to meet the needs of these students. For example, through the reallocation of funds to the Student Life Office this year, the campus realized a dramatic increase in the number of events sponsored by student organizations. The 240 student-organized events in FY00 represented a 57% increase from the FY99 level. The efforts to improve student life will continue through next year.

*Curricular Modifications Made to Address the Educational Needs of Students from Underrepresented Groups.* The development of the Capital Scholars Program, UIS' new lower-division curriculum, provided a unique opportunity to design a curriculum from the start that would take into consideration the learning styles of minority students. Curricular features of the program were designed to match research findings on the correlates of minority student achievement. These features include extensive student interaction with the teaching faculty; an emphasis on basic skills development in writing, computing, and critical thinking; widespread use of small-group collaborative learning activities; and involvement in a supportive learning community.



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