

Recruitment and Retention of Native American Flight Technology Students

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ABSTRACT

Central Washington University is located proximate to two counties with significant Native American populations, yet Native American students account for a small percentage of the total number of students enrolled in the CWU Flight Technology (FT) program. The retention rate of these students enrolled in FT degrees is significantly less than that of non-Native American students. The purpose of this study is to identify strategies to improve recruitment and retention of Native American students in the FT program. Suggested strategies include: recruitment at the middle school level, involvement with the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program, offering summer bridge programs, providing opportunities for involvement of families and tribal members, and mentorship assistance through the Native American Student Association.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

According to the summary of a study conducted by Pavel, Skinner, Farris, Cahalan, Tepeconic, and Stein, (1999) "data on Native Americans in postsecondary education can be hard to find" (p. 67). The study suggested that this is due to the small percentage of the total U.S. population that claims this race or ethnicity, and that "Native Americans make up the least stable racial-ethnic group in terms of self-identification" (p. 67). Pavel et al. reported that the overall level of educational attainment for Native Americans improved during the period between 1980 and 1990. Although the study revealed that during this time period the high school completion rate for Native Americans 25 years and older increased from 56% to 66 %, the completion rate still lagged behind the 1990 rate of 75% for the total population of all races and ethnicities. Pavel et al. stated that this increased high school completion rate suggested that more Native Americans "will be eligible for college enrollment in the coming years" (p. 68). Shutiva (2003) reported that Native American enrollment in colleges and universities increased by 67% between 1976 and 1994, and the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded to Native Americans during this period increased by 86%. The study by Pavel et al. reported the same increase in baccalaureate degrees for that period and added that the increase in baccalaureate degree recipients of all races and ethnicities increased by 27% for that period.

Pavel et al. reported that Native American enrollments in institutions of higher education (IHE) were highest in states that had large populations of Native Americans, and Washington State was one of five states that had more than 5,000 Native American students enrolled in IHE in 1994. Degree conferrals for Native Americans were also reported by Pavel et al. to be highest in those five states (Oklahoma, Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Washington). The Pavel et al. and Shutiva studies discussed data for the last three decades. Future studies will show if the trends are changing or remaining the same.

United States Census data for the year 2000 shows that 1.6% (n = 94,305) of the population of Washington State claimed American Indian or Alaska Native ethnicity (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The Census data also shows that two counties in close proximity to Central Washington University (CWU) had significantly higher percentages of Native American populations. Yakima and Okanogon Counties had Native American populations of 4.5% (n = 10,016) and 11.5% (n = 4,550), respectively. Despite this proximity of a large population of Native Americans, CWU's Institutional Research (IR) shows the percentage of Flight Technology (FT) students claiming Native American ethnicity during the ten-year period between 1994 and 2004 was 2.31% (n = 17), and the overall percentage of CWU students claiming this ethnicity was 1.92% (n = 660) (CWU, 2005b).

The FT degree completion rate for all specializations (management and pilot) for Native American students was less than half of the completion rate for non-Native American students. During the same ten-year period, 37.84% (n = 272) of non-Native American students enrolled in FT degrees completed a degree in FT, and 17.5% (n = 3) of enrolled FT students claiming Native American ethnicity completed a degree in FT (CWU, 2005b).

Enrollment figures for a neighboring community college that offers a two-year aviation degree show similar enrollment data. Between 2002 and 2004, 0.76% to 2.04% (n = 1 to 2) of the total aviation program student population at Big Bend Community College (BBCC) consisted of Native American students (BBCC, 2005).

The data show that although persons claiming Native American race or ethnicity constitute a low percentage of students enrolled in the FT program, the increasing percentage of such persons completing high school and baccalaureate degrees, especially in the five states identified above (including Washington State), offers the potential for increased recruitment of Native American students for the FT program.

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Identify barriers to college recruitment and retention of Native American students.
2. Determine strategies to improve recruitment and retention of Native American students in the FT program.
3. Identify potential resources to aid the FT program in implementing these strategies.

METHOD

A literature review was employed to determine previously identified barriers to recruitment and retention and strategies for improvement. Suggestions from the literature review were discussed for possible implementation by the FT program. Potential resources currently available at CWU were identified. Recommendations for improvement to recruitment and retention of Native American students in the FT program were made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barriers to Recruitment and Retention

Distance from Home and Peers Laughlin (2001) suggested that colleges often ignore nearby potential Native American students in favor of countrywide recruitment efforts. Schiller (2004) hypothesized that Native American college students have unique barriers that make it difficult for them to attend college, including difficulty adjusting to urban settings and separation from familial and cultural ties. Maxwell (n.d.) described unique challenges for Native American college students "including suppressing familial and spiritual beliefs, coping with existing stereotypes, and finding no one on campus with whom to identify" (p. 1). An American Indian/Alaska Native breakout group at a workshop conducted by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) suggested that Native American students often must move far from home and their support systems in order to attend college, and once there, they have few fellow Native American students and faculty for networking. The group stated that the majority of colleges do not have role models, mentors, or systems for cultural and social support for these students (NHLBI, 2001).

Insufficient Preparation for College

Laughlin (2001) stated that most Native American students attending colleges or universities are first-generation college students. Laughlin hypothesized that the parents of these students might not be familiar with the processes involved in applying to and acceptance by a college, and their school counselors might not be knowledgeable about available college opportunities. Laughlin stated that the "hit and run" recruiting visit that is often used effectively with other students "will not work when recruiting Native (American) students" (Laughlin, 2001, p. 4).

Pavel et al. (1999) stated that an "analysis of a sample of 1992 college-bound high school graduates revealed that the Native American students were, on average, less competitive for the college admissions process than the overall sample" (p. 69). Pavel et al. further cited that from 1982 to 1992, the completion rate for suggested pre-college curriculum increased from 6% to 31% for Native American high school

graduates compared to an increase from 13% to 47% for the overall sample.

Strategies to Improve Recruitment and Retention

College Preparation Laughlin (2001) suggested that tribal education personnel are often more familiar with individual students and families than the school counselors, and they are in a position to help recruiters reach prospective students. Shutiva (2003) recommended that counselors be familiar with specific tribal customs and values and stated that they can help college bound Native American students plan how to continue to honor such customs and values while attending college. Shutiva suggested that teachers and counselors consider advising students about additional financial planning to allow them to contribute to tribal ceremonies while attending college.

A study conducted by Turner, Trotter, Lapan, Czajka, Yang, and Brissett (2006) of a group of 183 adolescent Native American students residing in urban areas suggested "that career counselors who work with Native American young people should specifically attend to teaching them...career exploration, person-environment fit, and goal-setting skills" (p. 223). Such skills include setting "educational and vocational goals based on their exploration of self and the environment" (p. 223). Turner et al suggested that Native American community members and elders be utilized to help the students to develop "social and self-regulated learning skills" (p. 224). Turner et al. reported that their study had several limitations. They stated that the results could not be generalized to Native American students residing in non-rural areas, that causality could not be assumed from their results, and that further testing was required to confirm their hypothesis.

Mentoring and Peer Groups Maxwell (2001) stated that Native American students favor college counselors who are also Native Americans. Maxwell reported that many colleges recognize the benefits derived from providing opportunities for Native American students to be involved with peer groups. Schiller (2004) stated that the Native American Recruitment and Retention Center at the

University of California utilizes "student led recruitment and retention projects" for Native American students (p. 8).

Campus Encouragement of Diversity Several western colleges and universities have diversity initiatives. In support of these initiatives, some of these institutions have built or plan to build Native American Longhouses. The University of Oregon (UO) Longhouse opened on January 11, 2005 and replaced a prior Longhouse facility used since the early 1970's. The Longhouse provides, in part, student access, support (undergraduate and graduate) and a location for Native American gatherings (UO, n.d. a). The Evergreen State College's (TESC) Longhouse Education and Cultural Center opened on TESC campus in 1993. The Longhouse provides Native American students with a meeting place for student groups, academic support services, and information on scholarships (TESC, n.d.). CWU's Diversity Initiative has a memorandum of understanding with area tribes to promote "unity and cooperation between Native American Indian students, Signatory Tribes, and CWU" (CWUa, n.d. p. 3). The University has preliminary plans for a Native American Cultural Center (Follette, 2005).

Summer Bridge Programs UO's English department offers a summer bridge program for incoming Native American freshmen to help them prepare for college life (UOb, n.d.). Arizona State University (ASU) conducts a summer bridge program for Native American students. The five-week program introduces students to college life, provides courses designed to increase student success, teaches college skills, and provides Native American scientist and engineer role models (ASU, n.d.). Ohio State University (OSU) offers a multi-year bridge program for Native American and other minority students. The program has a summer component that begins three weeks prior to the beginning of the freshman year. OSU's program provides "culturally-relevant intervention, support, and advising to ensure a seamless transition from high school to college" (OSU, n.d. p. 1).

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) The U.S.

Department of Education offers six-year GEAR UP grants to states and partnerships to provide programs in low-income areas to encourage and prepare middle and high school students for college. The program works with cohort groups, starting no later than seventh grade and continuing through high school (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

In October 2002, CWU received a \$4.74 million GEAR UP grant to help middle school students prepare for college. The purpose of the grant program is to "develop student enrichment activities, tutoring programs, teacher development institutes, and parental and community involvement" as well as provide information on "financial aid availability, college admission procedures, and career planning" (CWU, 2002, 5). The initial program served five central Washington school districts located in or near Yakima County. In October 2005, CWU received an additional \$4.7 million GEAR UP grant to extend its project to seven more school districts located in or near Okanogan County (CWU, 2005a).

DISCUSSION

Pre-College Advising Prospective FT students who plan to enroll in flying specializations need to plan and prepare for the additional financial cost of flight training. The FT program requires a separate application process for FT students, and the program requires academic standards in addition to those imposed by the university for all incoming students (C. Hedrick, personal correspondence, April 7, 2006).

Recruitment Proximity The FT program has a limited recruitment travel and brochure budget (\$1,544 for the previous twelve months), and a classroom lecturer is assigned the additional duty of visiting high schools within the state of Washington (C. Hedrick, personal communication, April 7, 2006). CWU is a state institution and the majority of students (94% [n = 7,857]) enrolled for fall of 2005 at the Ellensburg campus were Washington residents (CWU, 2005b). Recruitment efforts focused in Washington State, specifically in Yakima and Okanogan counties, have the potential to reach a large target population and would help keep recruitment costs within the limited budget.

Additionally, Native American students recruited from these counties would have closer access to their peers and families. Proximity to recruitment areas increases the opportunities for FT recruiters to make initial and follow up contacts with tribal educators and school counselors regarding financial planning, the FT application process, and appropriate high school curriculum.

CWU Diversity Support CWU has a chapter of the Native American Student Association (NASA), a nationwide organization "designed to provide opportunities for American Indians and Native Alaskans pursuing studies in science, engineering, and technology arenas" (CWU, n.d. p. 2). The chapter sponsors Native American cultural activities on campus (CWU, n.d.). NASA provides mentorship opportunities for potential students. Although CWU does not have a Longhouse, a Native American Cultural Center is in the preliminary planning stage (Follete, 2005).

CWU GEAR UP Program The purpose of CWU's GEAR UP program is to improve CWU's recruitment and retention of students from low-income backgrounds. The school districts involved with the program are located within the two neighboring counties with large Native American populations. The GEAR UP program could be a valuable resource to the FT program in terms of both networking with targeted school districts and potential financial assistance for FT program involvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Begin recruitment at the middle school level in schools in local and neighboring counties, make follow up visits at least once a year, and maintain contact with interested students. Appropriate and timely guidance for early curriculum and financial planning prepares students for acceptance into the FT program.
2. Make contact with Title VII coordinators, tribal elders, parents, and others involved with Indian education programs to solicit their suggestions and continued assistance. Maintenance of cultural ties improves likelihood of retention and successful degree completion.

3. Enlist the assistance of financial aid, admissions, and student support services personnel when visiting target schools. Timely financial planning improves the likelihood that students can finish the FT program and set aside additional funds to support cultural activities.
4. Investigate the possibility of offering a summer bridge program for Native American students. A bridge program offers college-bound Native American students an opportunity to experience college life prior to beginning college and to begin forming relationships with mentors.
5. Enlist the assistance of NASA or other Native American on-campus organizations. Such organizations provide opportunities for mentoring and networking with the Native American students.
6. Provide opportunities to allow Native American FT students to invite their families and tribal members to meet with FT faculty, observe the operation of the program, ask questions, and discuss concerns. Such opportunities recognize the importance of maintenance of familial and cultural ties.
7. Research available on-campus resources, such as GEAR UP programs and NASA chapters, for networking and possible financial assistance.

Limited program faculty, staff, and budget dictate careful selection of strategies. Integration and utilization of existing resources can assist recruitment and retention efforts. Recruitment efforts limited to local and neighboring counties will help keep recruitment expenses within limited budgets.

FT program recruiters should heed the advice of Laughlin (2001) to avoid the "hit and run" style of recruitment (p. 4). Successful recruitment and retention requires continuing coordination with targeted school districts, tribal personnel, campus financial aid and admissions personnel, and Native American campus resources. A "hit and run" effort might be more detrimental to recruitment and retention than no effort at all.

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