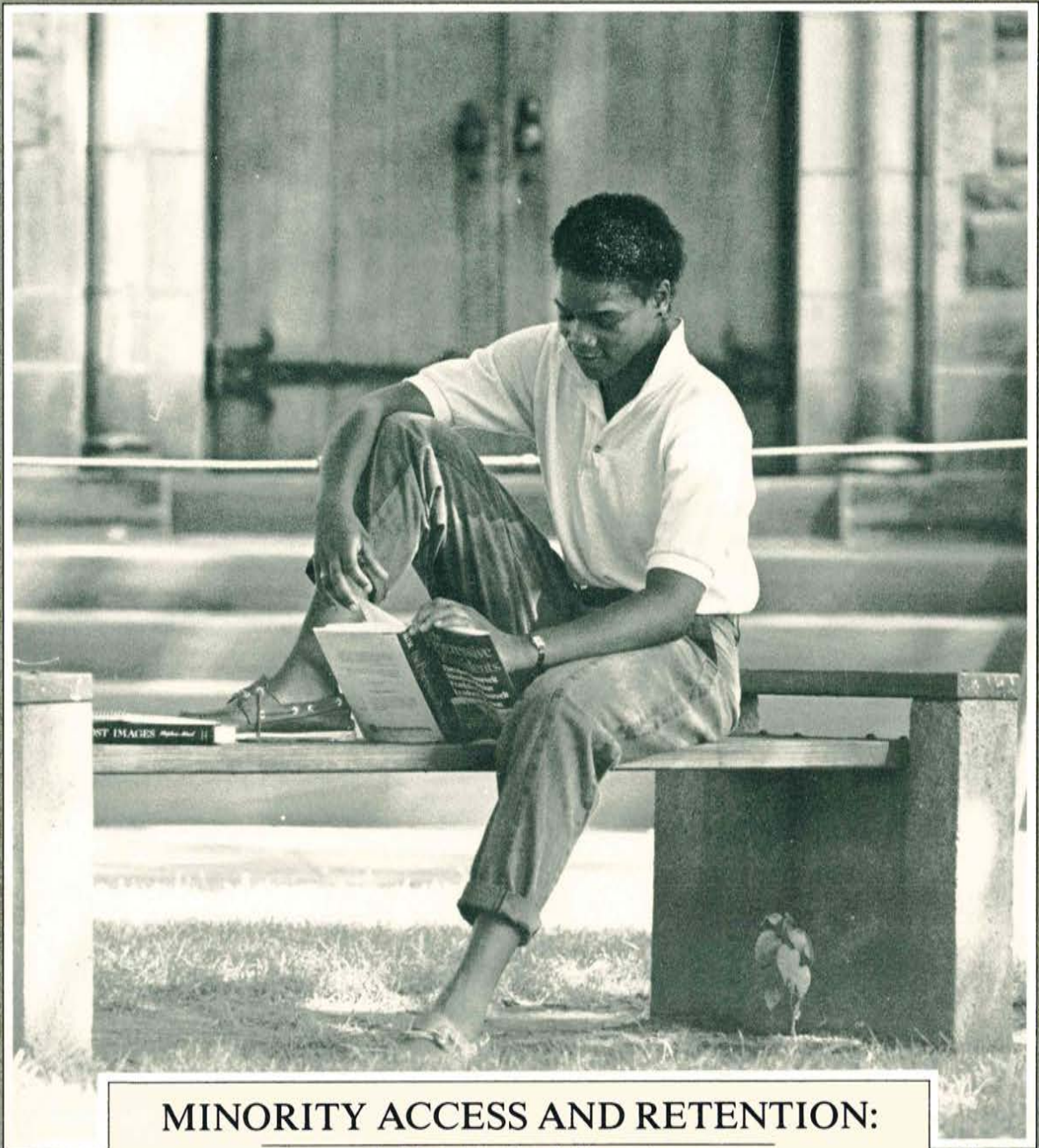


CONNECTION

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MINORITY ACCESS AND RETENTION:

A New England Necessity

Also:

— *Gordon A. Haaland on International Awareness* —
— *Planning New England's Energy Future* —

MIT's MINORITY SUCCESS RECORD

CLARENCE G. WILLIAMS

During the past five years numerous reports have been written on the problems of educating youth, especially minorities, at the precollege and college levels. Too many minority youngsters, including those in New England, are falling through the cracks of our educational system.

According to Betty Vetter of the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology, the nature of the American melting pot is changing. Minorities now constitute the majority of school enrollments in 23 of 25 of the nation's largest cities. Hispanics will experience the fastest population growth over the next decade, principally because of immigration. Black population growth will be the second fastest. From these projections we can see the need for concern about the admission and retention of minorities in the educational pipeline for the survival of our nation.

Historical perspective

MIT's success in recruiting minority students today is due to our philosophy and persistence in this area. A Task Force on Educational Opportunity was created in 1968 and chaired by Paul E. Gray, who was then associate provost. Periodically, we have reappraised and questioned our motives and results.

Two years ago, MIT began to focus its attention on general improvement of the undergraduate experience. Our admissions process is and will continue to be crucial to our recruitment of minority students. But we have realized that a good minority recruitment program isn't worth much without a well-thought-out retention program. From our historical base of profiles of minority students at MIT, we have a good idea of which students are likely to succeed here.

We have averaged approximately 100 minority students since 1968 out of a total class of about 1,000 students. Our graduation rate over a 12-year period has averaged 75 percent seven years after entry to MIT. We believe that our support structure has been good.

The most gratifying change this year is one that the admissions office worked hard to achieve. Applications from Afro-American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican

and Native American students increased by 41 percent, to 514. This year's class of approximately 1,000 includes 69 Afro-Americans, 39 Mexican Americans, 23 Puerto Ricans and two Native Americans. The group constitutes approximately 13 percent of the class.

Why MIT has been successful

There are several reasons for MIT's success in recruitment and retention of minority students.

First, we believe that curriculum reform has enabled us to appear more attractive to those minority students who want a broader educational experience. Second, the admissions office implemented a number of initiatives to create a more pluralistic student body and at the same time create a critical mass of minority students large enough to provide support for one another. Our actions included the addition of two new staff members, one to conduct admissions and market research and one to recruit minority students; production of a new audiovisual presentation, stressing the diversity of opportunity at MIT, which was then made available to high schools; and updating the literature MIT provides to high schools, to make our material more of an attention-getter among guidance counselors.

For several years, MIT has used "direct mail" to encourage particularly capable high-school seniors to apply,

using mailing lists generated by the National Student Search Service. This letter to high-school seniors was revised to make it a more personal and effective communication. The admissions office has published a tabloid newspaper specifically for applicants; admissions officers increased the number of visits they made in all regions; and all recruitment publications for the 1987-88 recruitment season were redesigned.

New and existing services to attract and support minority students have been brought together under the rubric "Pathway to the Future." The program includes special help in finding summer jobs that either offset college costs, provide valuable experience in industrial research and design, or both; summer sessions before the freshman year to help prepare minority stu-



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dents for the academic challenges they will face at MIT; and financial aid provisions that take into account the special circumstances often faced by minority families. We are now offering our lowest-income students MIT Opportunity Awards of up to \$2,500. These awards will be renewable for four years and will significantly reduce the student's loan and work obligation. At the same time, we continue to make all admissions decisions without regard to the financial need of each student we admit.

We believe that the past two years' success in our minority admissions program suggests that potentially outstanding students, regardless of their race, sex or intended major, are attracted to schools that have a commitment to academic excellence, diversity and retention.

Lessons learned

What have we learned about minority recruitment and retention that may provide some implications for all higher-education institutions? Let us look at minority recruitment first.

No institution has been able to sustain a minority recruitment program year after year without substantial support from its leadership. The president and other key officials must be willing to publicly identify minority recruitment and presence as a high priority.

Second, we believe it is necessary to have a minority professional who is directly responsible for providing leadership in minority recruitment. This person should have a high-level position in the admissions office (for example, associate director) in order to foster a respectable status in the outside recruitment communities. People-skills and personality are major factors in making recruitment plans successful, and they are of even more significance when dealing with minority candidates. I might add that a minority recruitment staff should be diverse and include both Hispanic and Afro American professionals.

The officer for minority recruitment should have the financial resources to create and develop recruitment strategies and programs. Although responsibility for the minority recruitment program should rest with this person, the program should be carefully balanced within the entire admissions office to involve all members in the process—visits to schools with high minority enrollments, for example.

Third, minority alumni can and should be involved in the recruitment of other minority students. During holidays and at the end of terms, school-sponsored trips for students to visit their former precollege schools can be most productive. Involving minority students in telephone calls to talk with prospective students has been very useful for us. Minority weekends have also been successful.

Fourth, we have found that a precollege enrichment program on campus increases the chances that minority students will matriculate.

FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND DIRECTORY

Harvard University's Graduate School of Education has published a first-of-its-kind directory for its alumni: "A National Sampling of Minority Alumni/Alumnae."

The listing provides access to a national network of education professionals from all minority groups, including Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. The alphabetized entries are divided by region and list occupation, home and business addresses, academic history, volunteer work, research/professional interests and accomplishments of note. A listing of ethnic affiliation is optional.

The project resulted from recommendations made by minority alumni of the school in response to a survey that asked them how their alma mater might serve their needs. According to Project Coordinator Michael Ignelzi, Ed.D. candidate in human development at the school, it is the first minority alumni directory to be produced by any division of Harvard.

The directory is an excellent resource for recruiters, and provides a wellspring of professional contacts, role models and mentors for young minorities interested in obtaining advanced education degrees.

Decreases in federal aid have made a difference

Data on federal grants and loans point to dramatic shifts in the way American college students and their families have coped with changing federal aid policies over the past six years. Changes in federal aid eligibility regulations have contributed to a steady decline in the proportion of freshmen who participate in the Pell Grant program, and a rapid increase in dependence on loans.

Freshman participation in the federally funded Pell Grant program has declined by nearly half since 1980, according to the most recent annual survey of entering freshmen conducted by the American Council on Education. Only 16.9 percent of the freshmen entering college last fall received Pell Grants, compared to 19.9 percent in 1985 and 31.5 percent in 1980. In contrast, last fall one freshman in four (25.4 percent) had a Guaranteed Student Loan, up from 21 percent in 1980.

Students who receive loans may not fare as well in college as their peers with fewer financial worries. Beyond the effect of reducing the number of students from poor backgrounds who attend college, research on student persistence and degree completion suggests that heavy reliance on loans may contribute to decisions to drop out of college.

Among minority students, the decision to drop out is driven as much by a lack of social integration as by academic performance. This means that such factors as high use of campus facilities, holding a job on campus and having informal contacts with teachers and students outside the classroom are important to persistence rates among minorities. In other words, students who are well-integrated into the academic and social environments are more likely to graduate. This finding takes on special importance for minority stu-

dents on majority campuses where they are less likely to fit and more likely to feel alienated. Moreover, on majority campuses, Black and other minority students often do not receive the mentoring and nurturing necessary for intellectual and personal growth. Academic and social advising for minorities continue to be less than satisfactory in enhancing survival rates and occupational successes among minority students.

Minority students, it appears, do not fully benefit from academic counseling at predominantly white colleges and universities. White faculty members, particularly in academic departments where historically minority students have not enrolled in any sizable numbers, too often feel that the quality of the department will decline with an increase in Black students.

For example, a study by James R. Mingle of SHEEO, the national organization of State Higher Education Executive Officers, found that white faculty intentionally communicated less with Black students than with white students. Mingle also reveals that "when faculty believe that Black students should meet the same 'standards' as whites, this tends to be translated into an unwillingness to alter traditional teaching styles or support institutional changes." Thus, the shortcomings in academic counseling and teaching of Black students thus are strongly associated with faculty attitudes and behavior at white institutions. The quality of academic advising in particular programs or majors within an institution is extremely important to minority students, since a college education of virtually any kind no longer guarantees employment opportunity and economic mobility.

Survey finds lack of support, racism

Our minority recruitment program is advancing, due to our willingness to continuously examine our progress with respect to the retention of minority students. We try to learn from the feedback that we receive, especially from minority students and alumni.

The best example of this is a study of the racial climate at MIT. This survey, conducted by telephone with Black men and women who attended MIT between 1969 and 1985, revealed that relationships between

Black students and white faculty members 'were often characterized by poor or inadequate support, negative expectations for Black student achievement, and occasionally some shocking discriminatory behavior. This often led to reluctance on the part of many Black students to seek academic help, and thus they lost the advantage of important educational resources.' Responses included the following:

- "The fact that I was Black made me conscious of what my community needed. We (Blacks) had to endure the perceptions of faculty, staff and students (predominantly white). Additional pressure as a Black [was on me] because I felt that if I failed, these people would think that all Blacks fail."

- "One professor has a hang-up about Black people. I went to talk to him about a grade, and he said, 'Maybe your people should go somewhere and do things that you people can do.'"

- Forty-four percent of the alumni reported that racism complicated their adjustment to MIT. Despite these problems, most Black graduates in the survey said they felt MIT 'was their best choice, and said they would do it again.'

In releasing the study to the public, President Gray stated: "The report carries a clear and disturbing message: that the environment for living and learning at MIT poses special problems for Black students. Facing up to this reality at MIT is not easy for us as individuals or as an institution. Each of us who lives, studies, works and teaches here must acknowledge that serious problems exist, and accept personal responsibility to do everything within his or her power to help in solving them."

Many people felt this report would seriously hamper our minority recruitment efforts for this year. But, in fact, our willingness to examine ourselves may have been our saving grace. One important strength of MIT is its ability to seek self-analysis regarding issues that most institutions overlook or sweep under the rug. □

Clarence G. Williams is special assistant to the president and assistant equal opportunity officer at MIT.

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