Need for Professional Leadership, Including Faculty and Staff, to Reflect the Diversity of the Student Population in Postsecondary Education

National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Resolution

(Approved March 2000 by NADE Executive Board; Updated and Approved December 4, 2010)

Resolution

Whereas, American postsecondary education continues to be increasingly diverse;

Whereas, admission policies at some postsecondary institutions have made higher education accessible to more of the nation's population;

Whereas, the traditional campus environment where the majority of students are white, male, heterosexual, Christian, and economically affluent is no longer the norm;

Whereas, engagement, belongingness, and connectivity in higher education are challenging for many students in diverse populations;

Whereas, students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities are more likely than their disengaged peers to earn a meaningful credential;

Whereas, research indicates that students from diverse populations often feel marginalized, which may prevent them from seeking and using resources to help them succeed;

Whereas, in order to encourage student use of appropriate resources, it is important that the institution provides a supportive learning environment with faculty, staff, and administrators who reflect the diversity of the student population and who are understanding and empathic to the needs of these students;

Therefore, be it resolved that the National Association for Developmental Education advocates that developmental education programs actively seek to create diverse learning environments that serve as models for institutions; and further,

be it resolved that the National Association for Developmental Education advocates that institutions facilitate diversity among faculty, staff, administrators, and programs.

Background

As our campuses become increasingly diverse, so will the needs and challenges faced by our students. With the increasing diversity among students in the U.S. population, the problem of low retention in higher education is a serious concern (Collins, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Especially in community colleges across the country, the doors are open for millions of Americans who might otherwise not be able to pursue higher education; however, they continue to struggle with low student persistence and completion rates, particularly among students of color, low-income students, and other students who face significant barriers to success (Achieving the Dream, 2010; Gardenhire-Crooks, et al, 2010). Numerous educational researchers have been cited over the years   (e.g. Astin, 1975, 1993; Bean, 1990, 2005; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Bridges, Cambridge, Kuh & Leegwater, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2000, 2005) to document consistently the assertion that " those who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely than their disengaged peers to persist through graduation" (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Vincent Tinto, the most frequently cited scholar on student retention, believes that student engagement is the most significant predictor of persistence (Tinto, 2000). He notes that many students leave college because they don't feel connected to peers, professors, and administrators at the institution (quoted in Harper & Quaye, 2009). According to Fleming (1994), "minority students who are in an unsupportive or hostile environment experience isolation, loneliness, and alienation that in turn affect their academic success." Feelings of alienation "may cause them to avoid…programs designed to help them succeed." (Thompson,1994; Suen, 1993). Similarly, Bean (1990, 2005) proposes that students leave when they are marginally committed to their institutions.

Programs and services designed to help students from diverse populations must be "offered in an environment comfortable for minority students by faculty and staff who empathize with them and in a manner that fosters minority participation." (Boylan, Saxon, White and Erwin, 1994).

Diversity among postsecondary students will continue to increase. It is imperative that our institutions create learning environments that support a wide range of students and address both their cognitive and noncognitive needs. This includes a commitment to recruiting and supporting program leadership that reflects the diversity of the students.

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