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# Exemplary Efforts in Psychology to Recruit and Retain Graduate Students of Color

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*Many psychology departments are striving for a greater representation of students of color within their graduate preparation programs with the aim of producing a more diverse pool of psychological service providers, scientists, and educators. To help improve the minority pipeline in psychology, the authors identify and describe recruitment and retention strategies used at 11 departments and programs considered to be making exemplary efforts to attract and retain minority students of color. The strategies most consistently used included engaging current minority faculty and students in recruitment activities, offering attractive financial aid packages, having faculty members make personal contacts with prospective students, creating linkages with historical institutions of color, having (or approached having) a critical mass of faculty and students of color, offering a diversity issues course, and engaging students in diversity issues research. Despite the similarities, the programs and departments were each distinctive and innovative in their overall approaches to student recruitment and retention. Highlighting the strategies used at successful institutions may help others develop plans for improving the minority pipeline within their own departments and programs.*

**Keywords:** climate, minority, recruitment, retention, students

**A**s universities and colleges across the country grapple with legal challenges that test their institutional support for affirmative action, predominantly White institutions are increasingly called upon to find alternative ways to ensure a diverse student body. In some cases, institutions of higher education have needed to justify their continued commitment to creating and maintaining a student body that is racially and ethnically diverse (Bowen & Bok, 1998). In recent years a growing body of evidence has suggested that institutions of higher education committed to diversity translate that commitment into positive outcomes and benefits for all students (American Council on Education and the American Association of University Professors, 2000; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). These benefits transcend the ethnic background of the students, so that all students report an increased ability to work with members of other ethnic groups, an increased acceptance of those from other cultural backgrounds, and an increased participation in community-based and other civic activities following graduation. These findings highlight the positive

consequences of a diverse student body and dispel myths about the perceived negative experiences of students exposed to race-sensitive admissions policies.

On a societal level, the benefits of a diverse workforce are also becoming better understood. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005) suggest an increased need for psychologists in all major employment sectors, from schools to public agencies to private companies. Research indicates that a diverse workforce provides economic benefits because heterogeneous groupings bring different perspectives to bear on problems, thus helping to solve them creatively and effectively (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003). In addition, a heterogeneous workforce provides new insights into the needs of previously underserved populations (Reskin, 1998). In the United States, ethnic minorities have long been identified as underserved in terms of access to, receipt of, and quality of mental health care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Increasing the representation of psychologists of color within the profession has the potential to benefit society by shedding light on unmet needs, contributing new knowledge, and keeping up with the increased demand for psychologists as service providers, scientists, and educators. Although an understanding of the benefits of affirmative action is becoming clearer, enrollment rates of students of color in higher education contexts continue to be threatened.

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In psychology, current data about enrollment and graduation rates for African American and Latino students in graduate programs warrant special concern. Most recently, Maton, Kohout, Wicherski, Leary, and Vinokurov (2006) found that the proportion of African American and Latino students who are reaching the highest levels of educational attainment (i.e., the PhD) has leveled off. Maton et al. found that for African Americans and Latinos, the enrollment rates from 1997 to 2003 and the PhD receipt rates from 2000 to 2003 stalled at one half or less their representation in the general population. Earlier reports examining enrollment and graduation rates for students of color across the educational pipeline have been equally discouraging. Looking at data from 1973 to 1993, the American Psychological Association's (APA) Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention, and Training in Psychology ([CEMRRAT] 1997) found a decreasing percentage of students of color attending doctoral programs in psychology and a downward trend in enrollments moving through the educational pipeline from bachelor's to master's to doctoral degrees. In addition, across all levels of degree programs, significant declines were observed when comparing enrollment and graduation rates for students of color; greater numbers of students of color were enrolled in programs than ultimately graduated from them (CEMRRAT, 1997). These data highlight the vexing disparities that exist between where psychology doctoral programs should be in terms of recruitment and retention of students of color and where they are.

The challenge to increase enrollments of students of color is one that faces many, if not most, doctoral programs in psychology. The training standards developed by the APA recognize the need for training programs to increase the representation of ethnic minority group members in

psychology programs. APA's commitment to improving the minority pipeline is reflected in the latest revision of the accreditation standards (APA, 2000c), and accredited programs are expected to engage in concerted efforts to attract and retain students of color. More generally, although all programs that constitute the educational pipeline in psychology are expected to engage in efforts to attract and retain students of color, evidence suggests that many programs struggle in these attempts (Hurtado et al., 1999; Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999).

Departments and graduate programs in psychology at predominantly White institutions may not know how to create educational and training environments that are perceived as welcoming and sustaining by students of color. As described in the CEMRRAT (1997) report titled "Visions & Transformations," faculty may be ambivalent about or resistant to the importance of a diverse student body. Negative faculty attitudes, even if covertly expressed and communicated, may become evident to students and lead to perceptions of a less than welcoming training environment. Some (e.g., Coopwood, 2000) have described predominantly White institutions as reflecting a "chilly climate" for students of color who attend them. Racial misunderstandings unsatisfactorily resolved, the use of racial stereotypes in classrooms, and curricula that do not incorporate ethnically diverse authors or diverse points of view all suggest the need for faculty to carefully analyze the social and academic environment that students inhabit.

Considerable research has been conducted on the importance of faculty consciously building educational and training environments that reflect the stated mission of the institution (e.g., Gelso, 1993; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Mallinckrodt & Gelso, 2002). For graduate programs that are clearly committed to maintaining a diverse student body and embracing multicultural perspectives, the techniques they use warrant investigation. Most recently, with the creation of APA's Suinn Minority Achievement Awards (begun as a yearly award in 1999 by then-APA president Richard Suinn), the psychological community is presented with one avenue for recognizing and learning about institutions committed to minority student recruitment and retention. The APA Suinn Minority Achievement Awards are awarded to psychology departments or graduate programs nominated by graduate students as exhibiting excellence in minority student recruitment and retention. Although these awards offer a glimpse into the accomplishments of noteworthy institutions, they do not provide an in-depth examination of the leading departments and programs.

For those interested in better understanding the characteristics of a multiculturally welcoming environment, research is needed that examines innovative approaches to recruitment and retention used by the leading institutions in the area of diversity. Thus far, studies and reports about recruiting minority students of color have looked at the use of a number of recruitment strategies, including mechanisms for identifying promising students of color (CEMRRAT, 1997), flexible admission criteria and financial aid (Curtis & Hunley, 1994), personal contacts (Ham-



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mond & Yung, 1993), and specially tailored program application packets (e.g., Bernal, Barron, & Leary, 1983; Bidell, Turner, & Casas, 2002; Ponterotto, Burkard, et al., 1995). Another body of research has examined student retention strategies. This research has suggested that financial assistance (Curtis & Hunley, 1994; Lott, 2005), the availability of diversity issues course work (Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995), and the presence of a diverse student and faculty body (Rogers, Hoffman, & Wade, 1998; Speight, Thomas, Kennel, & Anderson, 1995) all combine to create a socially and academically supportive environment. At psychology training programs and psychology departments that are renowned for their efforts to increase minority student enrollment and retain students through to graduation, little is presently known about the specific strategies used.

To assist programs and departments in achieving greater representation of ethnic minority group members in all areas of psychology, we examined programs and departments that are making exemplary efforts to increase minority participation. By highlighting the critical features of exemplary programs, we hope to provide guidance to those who are developing plans for improving the minority pipeline within their own institutions. Ultimately, our objective is to increase awareness of recruitment and retention strategies that exemplary institutions are employing and to facilitate the use of those strategies by departments and graduate programs across the country.

In this article, we identify and describe the strategies used by psychology departments and graduate programs in psychology that are making exemplary efforts to recruit and retain minority students of color. For the present purposes, minority students of color refer to persons who identify as Black/African American, Latino/Latina, Asian

American, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and biracial or mixed ethnic background. We conducted semistructured interviews with faculty and students at each of 11 identified departments and programs to learn how they attracted and retained students of color. Our examination of this small, highly select pool of departments and programs was exploratory and was designed to obtain a picture of their recruitment and retention experiences aimed at students of color.

## **Characteristics and Limitations of the Data**

### ***Exemplary Departments, Programs, and Interviewees***

The 11 participating psychology departments ( $N = 4$ ; 36%) and graduate programs ( $N = 7$ ; 64%) were identified on the basis of their status as “exemplary” (see the *Identifying the Exemplary Institutions* section). One faculty member (department chair for departments and program director for programs) and 2 students from each of the 11 exemplary institutions were asked to take part in semistructured interviews (see *The Semistructured Interviews* section). The faculty interviewees included 6 (55%) women and 5 (45%) men. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the faculty was 8 (73%) White/European American, 1 (9%) Black/African American, 1 (9%) Mexican American, and 1 (9%) Chicano/Anglo. Fifteen (75%) students were interviewed, including 8 (53%) women and 7 (47%) men. Among the students, 6 (40%) were White/European American, 3 (20%) Black/African American, 2 (13%) Asian American, 2 (13%) American Indian, 1 (6%) Latino, and 1 (6%) Mexican/Anglo. Thirteen (87%) students were not first-generation college students, whereas 2 (13%) were. Most students ( $n = 13$ ; 87%) were enrolled in at least their second year of graduate study, and 2 (13%) were first-year students.

The participating psychology departments were located at Oklahoma State University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the University of Michigan, and the University of Missouri—Columbia. Four (36%) counseling psychology programs participated, including Auburn University, Loyola University of Chicago, Teachers College—Columbia University, and Washington State University. One (9%) clinical psychology program at the University of Virginia and one (9%) clinical/community psychology program at the University of South Carolina participated. The 11th participating program was the school psychology program at San Diego State University (9%). All departments or programs except the school psychology program offer doctoral degrees. The school psychology program at San Diego State offers a specialist degree.

### ***Identifying the Exemplary Institutions***

Exemplary institutions were defined as those that, through a combination of efforts, had shown promise or had been successful in increasing the enrollment of minority students of color and retaining students through to graduation. To be considered for inclusion in the interviews, programs and departments needed to meet two predetermined conditions.



First, a large pool of programs or departments were identified on the basis of having met one of the following three criteria: (a) nominated for the Suinn 1999 APA Minority Achievement Award; (b) self-nominated or peer-nominated as exemplary by people on the electronic mailing lists of the Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology and APA's Divisions 9, 16, 17, 27, and 45; or (c) identified in studies published after 1995 that focused on exemplary multicultural training and minority recruitment (e.g., Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999; Rogers et al., 1998). Altogether, 70 departments and programs nationwide met these criteria.

The second condition for participation was that the nominated departments and programs enrolled 20% or more students of color on the basis of Green's (1998) recommendations about the importance of a critical mass of students of color in graduate training environments. The APA's (2000b) *Graduate Study in Psychology* and Peterson's *Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences* (2000) were consulted to determine the enrollment rates of each institution, and those with minority enrollments of 20% or greater were identified. From the 26 departments and programs that met these two conditions, the final pool of 12 participants was selected to reflect geographic, degree (master's, doctoral), and specialization (department, program area) diversity.

Once the 12 departments and programs were identified, department chairs (at the exemplary departments) and program training directors (at the exemplary programs) were asked to participate in semistructured phone interviews. In one case, the interview protocol was unusable. All protocols for the remaining 11 institutions were usable. During the interviews, faculty participants were asked to nominate a pool of potential student participants diverse in racial/ethnic backgrounds who could provide varied perspectives on their recruitment and retention experiences. In two cases, the participating faculty member did not nominate any students, and in three other cases, students were nominated but did not participate. All (100%) faculty members who were contacted participated in the interviews, and 15 of the 18 (75%) students participated. The interviews relied on the self-reports of faculty and students, were completed in 30–65 minutes, and were conducted in 2001.

### **The Semistructured Interviews**

The semistructured interviews were based on questions drawn from an exhaustive literature review about strategies used to enhance minority student recruitment and retention (Lott, 2005). Interview questions concerned student recruitment strategies (APA, 2000a; Arredondo, Chinsky, & Ayers, 1994; DeFour & Hirsch, 1990; Hammond & Yung, 1993; Ponterotto, Burkard, et al., 1995; Rogers, Ponterotto, Conoley, & Wiese, 1992), the student selection process (Guzman, 1991), student retention strategies (Bowman, Bowman, & DeLucia, 1990; Davis, 1991; Hale, 1991; Hurtado et al., 1999; Ponterotto, Alexander, et al., 1995; Rogers et al., 1998; Suarez-Balcazar, Durlak, & Smith, 1994), and the overall institutional training environment (Benson, 1990; Gregory, 2000; Hammond & Yung, 1993;

Townsend, 1994). Two versions of the interview protocol were developed to target either faculty or student participants. Although the questions were not identical for faculty and students, questions involved similar content so that it was possible to examine the degree of congruence in faculty–student perspectives on the same issue or aspect of training environment. The protocols were not identical because, in some cases, faculty and students did not have access to the same information about features of the program, department, or participant. For example, faculty members were asked about professional incentives for participating in minority recruitment and retention activities but students were not. Students were asked five questions not posed to faculty (e.g., year in graduate program, area of study, status as first-generation college student, experience with critical incidents involving diversity, advice regarding additional steps to improve recruitment and retention) to obtain a broader understanding of students' experiences during their graduate training. The faculty interview protocol contained 30 questions, and the student interview protocol contained 35 questions.

The interview questions regarding student recruitment focused on recruitment strategies that institutions use, including advertising, soliciting students from other universities, targeting students at own institution, contacting community-based professionals, recruiting through the APA's Minority Undergraduate Students of Excellence (MUSE) list, creating linkages between the home university and historical institutions of color or other universities with a high percentage of students of color, implementing a visitation program for potential students, engaging minority faculty and students in recruitment activities, making financial assistance available, having faculty make personal contact with prospective minority students of color, and distributing recruitment materials specifically geared to minority students of color. Two open-ended questions were included regarding whether the institution did anything special to attract or appeal to students of color.

The questions about the student selection process focused on the use of a range of factors involved in student admissions decisions. Participants were asked about information regarding undergraduate and graduate grade point averages (GPAs), Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, letters of recommendation, personal statements, involvement in previous research or applied experience, the potential matchup between faculty research interests and student interests, and any other factor considered by the program in making admissions decisions. The faculty participants were also asked if they considered the ethnic composition of an incoming class when making final admission decisions.

The questions about student retention concerned a range of issues regarding the kinds of academic and social support available within the program, department, and institution. Questions were posed about the use of student buddies and the availability of support groups, interest groups, and discussion groups for students. They also included questions about the use of faculty mentors, the involvement of students and faculty in diversity issues

research, the availability of diversity issues course work within the department, and the demographic breakdown of faculty and students within the department and graduate programs.

On the basis of the assumption that factors inherent to the training environment would have an impact on student recruitment and retention, questions about the overall training environment were designed to assess the level of commitment the university and department demonstrated concerning recruiting and retaining students of color. For example, faculty and students were asked about faculty involvement in campuswide diversity initiatives, the presence of a diversity committee, and a description of the diversity emphasis as being specific to the program or department. Faculty were also asked about university and departmental support for diversity initiatives, incentives to faculty and departments for increasing minority student enrollments, presence of faculty professional development opportunities aimed at improving cultural competence, evidence of diversity commitment in the departmental mission statement, and an assessment of the relative success of the recruitment and retention efforts within the broader institutional environment.

## **Key Features of the Exemplary Departments and Programs**

### ***Faculty and Student of Color Representation***

All participating departments reported the presence of at least 1 full-time faculty member of color, with the range from 4% to 33% ( $M = 15\%$ ) of the overall faculty. More specifically, out of the four departments, two departments employed 1 faculty member of color (out of 15 and 28 total faculty members, respectively), one department employed 5 faculty members of color out of 25 total faculty members, and the fourth department employed 32 faculty members of color out of 97 total faculty members. Among the participating programs, full-time faculty members of color accounted for 0–3 (0%–50%) of the program faculty, with an average of 2 (25%) core program faculty members. Even within the two (18%) programs that did not employ a faculty member of color among their core faculty, faculty members of color were represented among the remaining full-time departmental faculty. Among the student bodies of the participating departments, the range of students of color was from 24% to 28% ( $M = 27\%$ ). At the participating programs, students of color represented 22%–90% of the program student body ( $M = \sim 39\%$ ). Across departments and programs, the ratio of faculty to graduate students ranged from a low of 1 faculty member to 2 students, to a high of 1 faculty member to 11 students ( $M = 1:5.5$ ).

### ***Recruitment Techniques Used***

We asked faculty and students to describe their department's or program's use of 11 different recruitment strategies aimed at attracting students of color. As shown in Table 1, faculty and students agreed most about the presence of financial aid, the involvement of existing minority

faculty and students in recruitment efforts, and the personal contacts that faculty made with prospective minority students. Across the programs, students seemed relatively uninformed about the variety of other techniques used by faculty to attract minority students of color, although no clear pattern was detected in how informed students were about recruitment on the basis of their ethnic status.

All participating departments and programs provided some type of financial aid package for new students. The extent of the financial support varied from full tuition waivers and stipends for the duration of the graduate program to stipends for a set interval of time without tuition waivers. Regardless of the type of financial support provided, 10 (91%) of the institutions reported that they advertised their funding opportunities in brochures or on Web sites. All institutions also reported involving existing minority faculty and/or students of color in the process of drawing students in, but the type of involvement varied by institution. At one institution, factors seen as critical to drawing new students into the program included (a) employing multiple senior faculty members of color who, in addition to being identified as highly productive scholars and leaders within the field, had a reputation for actively engaging in diversity issues research and (b) hosting an annual conference on cross-cultural issues. At another institution, a group of current students met with prospective students of the same minority background during an interview day to discuss their experiences within the program. At three other institutions, existing graduate students and faculty members of color were very active in recruiting at their alumni undergraduate institutions.

A number of other recruitment strategies were also frequently used. Ten institutions (91%) had faculty who made personal contacts with prospective students. Nine institutions (82%) reported establishing linkages with historical institutions of color for the purpose of creating a pipeline of students of color into the graduate program or department. Faculty at these institutions typically developed ongoing relationships with faculty at an institution that enrolled a high percentage of students of color to inform and encourage applications. Eight (73%) of the institutions specifically targeted undergraduate minority students of color at their home institutions for recruitment. Seven (64%) of the institutions also sponsored prospective students on visits to their campus and provided them with the opportunity to visit their graduate programs, meet with faculty and students, and tour their facilities. In most (86%) cases, the expenses associated with the campus visitation program were covered by the home institution. Seven (64%) of the institutions also created recruitment materials that were specifically geared to minority students of color. These materials were available either online or were part of student application packets. Departments and programs that had online Web sites describing and advertising their graduate training were enthusiastic in portraying their Web sites as their most important recruitment tool.

Other recruitment techniques used by the participating institutions included soliciting students from other institutions ( $n = 6$ ; 55%), contacting professionals in the field for

**Table 1**  
*Recruitment Techniques Used by Psychology Departments and Programs to Attract Minority Students of Color*

Department/program and institution	Financial aid provided	Engage current minority faculty and/or students	Faculty make personal contacts	Create links with historical institutions of color	Target undergraduates at home institution	Offer visitation program	Recruitment materials specifically geared	Solicit from other institutions	Contact professionals in field	Use MUSE list
Department										
Oklahoma State U.	F S S	F S S	F S*	F S*	F S*	F S*	F S S	F S S	S*	F S*
U. of Southern Illinois at Carbondale	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S	F S S	S	F	F S S	S	S
U. of Michigan	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S S	F*	F S S	S*	S*	F**	S*
U. of Missouri—Columbia <sup>a</sup>	F	F	F	F	F	F	F			
Counseling program										
Auburn U. <sup>b</sup>	F	F	F	F	F			F		F
Loyola U. of Chicago	F S S	F S S	F S S	**	F**	F S	F S*	F S*	F S S	**
Teachers College—Columbia U. <sup>a</sup>	F	F								
Washington State U.	F S S	F S S	F S S	F*	S*	F	F*	F**	F*	F**
Clinical program										
U. of Virginia	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S	S	S		S*	*	F*
Clinical/community program										
U. of South Carolina <sup>c</sup>	F S	F S	F S	F S	F*	F	F S	F S	F*	*
School program										
San Diego State U.	F S S	F S S	F S S	F*	F S*	F*	F S*	S*	F S S	F*

Note. Responses recorded within each cell reflect faculty and student responses. F = faculty affirmative response; S = student affirmative response; \* = student "don't know" response; blank = negative response. MUSE = Minority Undergraduate Students of Excellence.

<sup>a</sup> No students were nominated for participation. <sup>b</sup> No students were available for participation. <sup>c</sup> One student participated.

student referrals ( $n = 5$ ; 45%), and employing the APA MUSE list ( $n = 5$ ; 45%) to target undergraduate minority students. Departments and programs that did not use the MUSE list commented that the list was published too late in their recruitment process to be of any use.

### **Student Selection Procedures**

Faculty were asked to rate the relative importance of eight different factors commonly used in making admissions decisions about prospective students. Faculty indicated whether a given factor was highly important, moderately important, or of low importance. The leading factor rated as highly important in admissions decisions across all institutions except one (91%) was strong letters of recommendation. The 11th institution rated recommendation letters as moderately important. The personal statement was also rated highly by 9 institutions (82%), and the remaining 2 institutions (18%) judged personal statements to be between moderately and highly important. Depending on the research or practice emphasis within the graduate program, prior research or applied experiences were rated highly by 8 institutions (73%). Interviews were rated highly by 7 institutions (64%), with most favoring a face-to-face interview. Seven institutions (64%) rated undergraduate GPAs highly. Five institutions (45%) rated graduate GPAs highly, and 4 (36%) rated them to be of moderate importance. Two institutions (18%) did not typically admit students with prior graduate work. Institutions varied somewhat in their ratings of the importance of potential matchups between faculty and student research interests. Six institutions (55%) rated faculty and student matchups as highly important, and the remaining 5 (45%) rated such matchups as of moderate importance. For several programs, the degree to which the matchups were rated highly depended on whether the program used a mentorship model in which individual faculty worked exclusively with one mentee per incoming class.

The single factor receiving the most mixed ratings was the use of GRE scores in admissions decisions. Only two institutions (18%) rated GRE scores highly; seven (64%) considered them to be moderately important, one (9%) rated them to be of little importance, and one (9%) did not consider GRE scores in admissions decisions. Only two institutions (18%) reported using a minimum GRE score as a cutoff. When asked if the racial and ethnic mix of the entire incoming class was considered when making final admissions decisions, all (100%) institutions responded affirmatively, with some also reporting age, gender, and geography as additional important considerations.

### **Retention Strategies Used**

Table 2 contains the retention strategies used by the 11 departments and programs. All institutions used three strategies. All departments and programs reported having a critical mass of students of color, encouraging active engagement of students in diversity issues research with faculty, and offering at least one diversity issues course within their department. Another frequently used retention technique was the establishment of faculty mentorships for

students. Nine institutions (82%) had a system established to provide mentoring to students. Typically, however, the faculty mentorship arrangements applied to all students and were not specific to students of color. At some institutions, the mentoring relationships were established through assignments made by the program director. At other institutions, the matchups were initiated by faculty or students.

The institutions engaged in a number of efforts to facilitate peer social support including (a) establishing campuswide support groups (73%), (b) creating student mentorship or buddy networks (55%), and, less commonly, (c) developing student-centered interest groups (9%). Students were asked if they had experienced any critical incidents regarding diversity issues that had an impact on their assessment of their graduate-training environment. Of interest was whether the institutions addressed those concerns directly with discussion groups to help resolve the issue. Faculty at five (45%) of the institutions reported that they responded to critical incidents within their programs or departments with discussion groups or planned interactions to address concerns and diffuse difficult situations. Four students described critical incidents involving diversity issues. In two instances, White/European American students described being in the minority for the first time in their lives because of their race/ethnicity and talked about how this had helped them understand a minority group member's perspective. One student was concerned about program commitment to minority admissions after observing that the number of minority student admissions varied greatly from year to year. Another student questioned the use of different grading standards by faculty when it was discovered that the sole student to fail an important exam was a student of color. These events underscore the need for faculty to consider the impact of programmatic events on student perceptions of their training environment.

### **University and Departmental Climate**

Table 3 presents data on the institutional supports and resources found at the participating institutions. All departments and programs reported that their university and, in the case of programs, their departments were supportive of their minority recruitment and retention efforts. All departments and programs also had faculty members who were actively involved in campuswide diversity initiatives. These campuswide commitments took a variety of forms. For example, faculty at two institutions made contributions to the curriculum through teaching specialized diversity courses or by serving on a universitywide curriculum development committee. Faculty at one institution developed and taught an undergraduate course on diversity issues that was part of the core undergraduate curriculum. At another campus, faculty taught a course called "Intergroup Dialogue" to resident assistants. Still other faculty were involved as liaisons or board members to an institution's Black Cultural Center, Chicano Student Association, Disability Support Center, or Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Center. Another group of faculty served on search committees for open positions within campus multicultural

**Table 2**  
Retention Strategies Used by Psychology Departments and Programs to Retain Minority Students of Color

Department/program and institution	Critical mass of students of color <sup>a</sup>	Diversity course(s) offered	Relevant research involvement	Faculty mentors	Support group students of color	Student mentors/buddies	Discussion groups	Interest groups
Department								
Oklahoma State U.	F	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S S		
U. of Southern Illinois at Carbondale	F	F S S	F S S	S S	F S S	S S		S
U. of Michigan	F	F S*	F S*	F S S	F S S	S*	F	
U. of Missouri—Columbia <sup>b</sup>	F	F	F	F	F	F		
Counseling program								
Auburn U. <sup>c</sup>	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
Loyola U. of Chicago	F	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S S	F	S*
Teachers College—Columbia U. <sup>b</sup>	F	F	F	F	F	F		
Washington State U.	F	F S S	F S S	F S S	F S	S	S	
Clinical program								
U. of Virginia	F	F S S	F S S	F S	S S	F S		
Clinical/community program								
U. of South Carolina <sup>d</sup>	F	F S	F S	F S	S	F S	F	
School program								
San Diego State U.	F	F S S	F S S	F S	S*	F S	F S	F S*

Note. Responses recorded within each cell reflect faculty and student responses. F = faculty affirmative response; S = student affirmative response; \* = student "don't know" response; blank = negative response. <sup>a</sup> Only faculty responded to the question. <sup>b</sup> No students were nominated for participation. <sup>c</sup> No students were available for participation. <sup>d</sup> One student participated.



**Table 3**  
*University Climate Indicators of Support*

Department/program and institution	University and department supportive <sup>a</sup>	Faculty campuswide diversity initiatives	Emphasis specific to program or department	Department diversity affairs committee	Department mission statement on diversity <sup>a</sup>	Faculty development opportunities <sup>a</sup>	Faculty incentives/recruitment/retention <sup>a</sup>	Department incentives/recruitment/retention <sup>a</sup>
Department Oklahoma State U.	F	F S S	S S	S S	F		F	
U. of Southern Illinois at Carbondale	F	F S S	F S S					F
U. of Michigan	F	F S S	F	**	F	F	F	F
U. of Missouri—Columbia <sup>b</sup>	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
Counseling program Auburn U. <sup>c</sup>	F	F	F	F	F			
Loyola U. of Chicago	F	F S*	F S S	F S	F	F		
Teachers College—Columbia U. <sup>b</sup>	F	F	F					
Washington State U.	F	F S S	F S S	F	F	F	F	F
Clinical program U. of Virginia	F	F S*	S	F S S				F
Clinical/community program U. of South Carolina <sup>d</sup>	F	F	F S	F S				F
School program San Diego State U.	F	F**	S S	F S*	F	F		

Note. Responses recorded within cells reflect faculty and student responses. F = faculty affirmative response; S = student affirmative response; \* = student "don't know" response; blank = negative response. <sup>a</sup> Only faculty responded to the question. <sup>b</sup> No students were nominated for participation. <sup>c</sup> No students were available for participation. <sup>d</sup> One student participated.

centers, or they contributed to yearly scholars programs or campus-based multicultural symposia.

To develop faculty cultural competencies, five institutions (45%) provided faculty with professional development opportunities (e.g., teaching institutes, curriculum consulting, affirmative action workshops, funding for attendance at the National Multicultural Summit or the annual Columbia University—Teachers College Cross-Cultural Roundtable). At some institutions, faculty and/or departments were recognized for their recruitment and retention efforts with incentives. At five institutions (45%), faculty were given awards or financial support for taking part in multicultural activities, research, or curriculum transformation efforts. Departments and programs were also recognized at four institutions (36%) for using innovative approaches to recruit and retain students of color, typically through additional funding opportunities and support.

### **Broader Institutional Context**

To obtain a clearer picture of the broader context of the institutions, we gathered information from institutions' Web sites, the Carnegie Foundation, and *Peterson's* guides about the size of the institution; student body demographics; school classification as public, private, or religious; and the demographics of the surrounding community. All institutions served a predominantly White student body and, with two exceptions, were located in predominantly White communities. The demographic composition of the surrounding communities ranged from 35% White/65% minority to 81% White/19% minority. Four institutions were situated in urban locations, two in suburban locations, three in small towns, and two in rural communities. Student body enrollments, combining undergraduate and graduate students, ranged from approximately 11,500 to about 40,000, with most institutions (82%) enrolling more than 19,400 students. Student demographic data suggest considerable diversity in the breakdown of students by gender, minority status, and international status. Institutions enrolled a range of students: 46%–65% female ( $M = 54\%$ ), 11%–38% minority ( $M = 20\%$ ), and 3%–12% international ( $M = 6.5\%$ ) students. All institutions were classified as doctoral/research universities, nine were public, two were private (and of those, one was religious; i.e., Jesuit). In comparison to the public institutions, the two private institutions had the smallest total enrollments (about 11,500 students), the highest proportions of female students (60% and 65%), and two of the three highest total minority student enrollments (27% and 29%). These two institutions, combined with one of the public institutions, had the highest minority student enrollments proportionately (i.e., 27%, 29%, and 38%, respectively) and were the only institutions located in major metropolitan areas with populations exceeding 1.2 million.<sup>1</sup>

### **Assessment of Recruitment and Retention Efforts**

Faculty and students were asked what they considered to be the distinctive or special efforts their institutions engaged

in to attract and retain minority students of color. Students were also asked what steps they thought should be taken to improve minority recruitment and retention at their institution. With regard to faculty, although they had very divergent views about the recruitment efforts and approaches to recruitment that made their specific institution distinctive, a common theme emerged across institutions about the importance of developing a pipeline between a historical institution of color and the home institution. Many (55%) of the faculty perceived that the variety of efforts they devoted to creating connections and networks with historical institutions of color yielded the most rewards. One faculty member reported that the connections created a steady stream of minority applicants who applied because they knew someone like themselves who was already enrolled at the school. A related theme concerned the presence of a critical mass of students of color, faculty of color, or both. Several faculty noted that it is important for students of color to enroll in and graduate from a program in order to build a reputation of academic success. Another faculty member reported that employing a critical mass of senior faculty of color as core program faculty and maintaining active collaborations between faculty and students on diversity issues research heightened the visibility of the program, created a climate of respect and support, and were critical "golden factors" that drew students in.

From the students' perspective, the recruitment strategies that were distinctive fell into three major categories. First, the students concurred with faculty about the benefits of recruiting at historical institutions of color. Second, the students reported that the reputation of the department or program for bringing together diverse students and faculty and for graduating students of color was attractive to prospective students. Third, a mix of other recruitment strategies was mentioned including Web sites, personal contacts between faculty and prospective students, and a yearly multicultural symposium—all strategies considered by the students to be key to successful recruitment efforts.

The features that were believed to have the greatest impact on retention fell into two categories. First, almost all students and faculty mentioned the importance of social support and mentoring. Most faculty defined this in terms of strong faculty–student relations and a climate of collaboration, ongoing feedback, and flexibility. One faculty member reported, "We are very conscious of our climate and pride ourselves on having strong relationships with faculty and students. . . . We solicit a lot of feedback from our students." Another faculty member reported, "We pay a lot of attention to students' development and integrate feedback into early reviews of their performance." Students mentioned not only strong faculty–student relations but also emphasized the social support provided by others. The support came from a number of sources, including classmates, staff, faculty, campus-based support groups, department committees, and student buddies. This support not

<sup>1</sup> A report detailing the characteristics of the institutions and their surrounding communities is available from Margaret R. Rogers.

only helped students in their adjustment to a new community and to the graduate school experience but it also provided them with a vision of future accomplishment by exposing them to students and faculty of like ethnicity who are successful. One faculty member reported that “Graduating students of color was critical in helping to retain students.” Anecdotal reports suggest that minority graduation rates at the participating institutions are high; these informal observations need to be validated in future research. Students and faculty also perceived that financial support (e.g., fellowships, assistantships, etc.) was important in retaining students through to graduation.

When asked what additional steps their institution could take to improve recruitment and retention, 50% of the students suggested engaging in even more outreach by minority and nonminority faculty and connecting with more students at historically Black undergraduate institutions. Other suggestions from the students included employing a faculty member of color within the core program faculty and becoming more organized and systematic in the recruitment approaches used.

It should be noted that across all questions, student ethnic status did not seem to be related to knowledge about the exemplary institution. Students of color and White/European American students were equally likely to concur with faculty observations of the recruitment and retention approaches used at their institutions. It is likely that because the faculty nominated the students for the interviews, the faculty selected students who were highly knowledgeable, observant, engaged, and supportive irrespective of ethnic background. Future research should explore the impact of other student selection procedures.

## Discussion

What recruitment and retention efforts seem to matter most? Our exploration focused on a select group of psychology departments and graduate programs in counseling psychology, clinical psychology, clinical/community psychology, and school psychology nationwide. Still unknown is what strategies are used at graduate programs in other scientific and applied psychology specialties (e.g., developmental psychology, educational, industrial/organizational, social, etc.). Given that consideration, the most prominent feature that seemed to drive all recruitment and retention efforts and activities across the exemplary departments and programs was the high level of institutional, administrative, and/or faculty commitment and support for a diverse student body. Faculty commitment, passion, and talents were evident in numerous ways, from special efforts to boost student financial aid, to curriculum transformation activities, to seeking out and developing pipelines with historical institutions of color, to creating a graduate preparation environment characterized by a climate of respect, positive support, and strong interest. As administrators or as graduate faculty, faculty members were the driving force that galvanized, united, and guided the priorities of each institution. Although it is not possible to create a composite or prototypical picture of the exemplary institutions examined here because no two institutions approached student

recruitment and retention in the same ways, there were a number of common characteristics that the exemplary departments and programs shared. The most promising recruitment and retention strategies are highlighted in the next section. In addition, we examine some common characteristics that emerged among the factors influencing admissions decisions.

## Promising Recruitment Strategies

To attract minority students of color, the exemplary institutions were most consistent in providing attractive financial aid packages, having faculty who made personal contacts with prospective students, and involving faculty and students of color during recruitment. The exemplary departments and programs also had a high representation of faculty and students of color, a characteristic seen as both a recruitment and a retention strategy. The exemplary departments employed on average 15% faculty of color and enrolled 27% students of color; programs contained an average of 25% faculty of color and 39% students of color. Even for the two programs that did not employ a minority faculty member among the core faculty, the departments in which the programs were located employed 22% and 18% faculty of color, respectively, so that minority faculty members were prominent within the immediate educational and training environment. Faculty and students generally agreed that creating a pipeline between historical institutions of color and their own institution was also a beneficial recruitment strategy. This combination of characteristics and strategies allowed prospective students to learn about the graduate education and training offered at the exemplary institutions and to begin to develop relationships with key people while considering attending the programs; it also communicated the presence and success of people of color and provided information about financial support—a package of features that highlights the strengths of the exemplary institutions and their innovations in recruitment.

The demographic composition of the exemplary departments and programs presents some interesting comparisons with data describing the racial/ethnic composition of graduate faculty and graduate students in psychology departments in the United States in general. APA’s most recent survey of graduate psychology departments (APA Research Office, 2005) indicated that faculty of color make up 12% of the typical graduate department (in comparison to the present findings of 15% and 25% for program faculty) and that students of color account for 21% (in comparison to the present findings of 27% for departmental students and 39% for program students). Thus, exemplary departments and programs show greater representations of students and faculty of color than do departments and programs in general. Engaging a critical mass of faculty and students of color is clearly a significant priority for the exemplary institutions and appears to have a positive impact on both recruitment efforts and retention. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g., Hills & Strozier, 1992; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987; Rogers et al., 1998) emphasizing the importance of establishing a

critical mass of people of color in creating a training environment that is welcoming and supportive.

To recruit students of color, the departments and programs typically employed a wide array of specific strategies. Across 10 of the programs and departments, the number used ranged from five to nine strategies; the average number of techniques in use was 7.7 out of 10 possible strategies, suggesting that the majority of institutions employed a diverse array of strategies. Programs and departments interested in diversifying their student body and intensifying their recruitment efforts would be well advised to consider employing the techniques in use at the exemplary institutions. It is possible that certain techniques are more important than others for different groups of students, and further study is needed to clarify these relationships. In addition, the APA should distribute the MUSE list earlier than it has in recent years, because it is of limited use when distributed too late in the recruitment process.

### **Factors Influencing Admissions Decisions**

In making admissions decisions, faculty placed the most emphasis on information obtained from letters of reference, personal statements, and prior research or applied experiences. More traditional selection factors, notably GRE scores and graduate GPAs, were considered to be less important overall. This finding underscores a second important way in which the exemplary programs and departments differ from other graduate training environments in psychology. For example, Purdy, Reinehr, and Swartz (1989) found that training directors at the top graduate programs in psychology in the United States rated GPAs, GRE scores, and letters of reference as the three most important elements of an admissions application. In another study (Bonifazi, Crespy, & Rieker, 1997), training directors at APA-accredited clinical, counseling, and school psychology programs also considered these same three elements to be the most important. A notable difference between the present findings and those of the Purdy et al. and Bonifazi et al. studies is the finding that GREs received the most inconsistent support at the exemplary institutions. Relying less heavily on GRE scores and other more traditional selection criteria seems to be a hallmark of the exemplary institutions' approach to deciding which students they would like to encourage to enter their institution.

The factors given the most weight in graduate admissions decisions at the exemplary institutions should be of special interest and import to prospective applicants interested in attending them. A recent study conducted by Nauta (2000) suggests that undergraduate students do not emphasize the importance of letters of recommendation when considering the factors that are most important in their graduate school applications. The present results suggest that students of color should make sure that they secure positive letters of reference when applying to graduate school and should also pay special attention to preparing their personal statement, acquiring research experience, and accumulating relevant work experience.

### **Promising Retention Strategies**

The exemplary institutions all used five strategies to create a welcoming and supportive environment to encourage retention through to graduation. All of the departments and programs contained a critical mass of students of color, provided students with opportunities to collaborate with faculty on diversity issues research, offered at least one diversity issues course, and had faculty who were involved in a wide array of campus-based diversity initiatives. In addition, faculty at all of the departments and programs perceived that their commitment to recruiting and retaining minority students of color was supported within the broader institutional environment—at the campus level and/or the department level. It is interesting to note that in recognition of the need for faculty to develop their cultural competence, professional development opportunities for faculty were present at 45% of the exemplary institutions. Professional development seems not only beneficial to developing faculty sensitivity but also to ensuring that faculty have the requisite skills to manage the classroom dynamics made unique because of an emphasis on diversity issues (Hurtado et al., 1999). Faculty members play a special role within a graduate program and department in setting attitudinal and behavioral norms (Tori & Ducker, 2004). Special attention should be devoted to ensuring that all faculty are not only comfortable but also skilled in managing challenging pedagogical situations as they learn to integrate multicultural themes into their courses.

When faculty and students were asked what special approaches their program or department engaged in to retain minority students of color, both groups highlighted social support, mentoring, and financial support, with varying levels of emphasis. These findings are consistent with those of previous research. Adkins-Hutchison (1996), Davidson and Foster-Johnson (2001), DeFour and Hirsch (1990), and Hurtado et al. (1999) have all suggested that the degree to which minority students of color are integrated into their academic and social networks influences their achievement and emotional well-being. Although the exemplary institutions achieved this in different ways, they all provided students with multiple formal and informal opportunities to interact across different settings. Faculty generally perceived faculty–student mentoring relationships to be critically important, whereas students emphasized that in addition to faculty–student mentorships, support from other sources was vital to their success. At two institutions, departmental staff of color were specifically noted for being instrumental in offering support to entering students, dispensing information about negotiating the graduate school experience, and providing ongoing moral support to students. This is similar to Taylor and Olswang's (1997) findings that "personal, concerned contact" (p. 16) between students and staff of color was critical to creating a supportive environment. Culturally relevant rituals and activities organized by various multicultural centers were also important in reducing isolation, improving adjustment, and communicating belonging and connection to students. Two students also mentioned the importance of an infra-



structure within their institution that handles complaints, grievances, and concerns regarding diversity in an affirming, just, and supportive manner.

### Concluding Comments

The departments and graduate programs discussed in this article all existed at predominantly White doctoral research institutions, and although no pattern was observed in the geographic location, size of community, or demographic composition of the community, the institutions were mid-size to very large in overall student enrollments. Although students were not asked how features of the surrounding community affected their decisions to attend the institutions, it is likely that these factors influenced their decision making and overall satisfaction once enrolled. The community-based and other social/personal factors that encourage and discourage students of color to enroll and persist in graduate preparation programs warrant exploration. Finally, the faculty, support staff, and students at the exemplary institutions deserve recognition for their creative, systematic, and labor-intensive efforts to attract, admit, and retain students of color in their graduate training environments. For the profession of psychology to keep pace with demographic changes occurring across the nation, we must emulate these innovations in recruitment and retention or live to witness a profession that does not adequately represent its constituency.

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