Multicultural Scholars Program

An Assessment of the Participant Experience and Program Goals

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AGENDA

• Introduction
• Literature Review
• Methodology
• Results & Findings
• Discussion
• Recommendations
INTRODUCTION
PURPOSE

A three-part assessment that sought to:

• To determine if the Multicultural Scholars Program meets its goals and objectives
• To assess the experiences of the students enrolled in the Multicultural Scholars Program
• To gain insight into the usefulness and effectiveness of the Multicultural Scholars Program based on feedback from those involved with all aspects of the program
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What are the experiences of the students in the Multicultural Scholars Program?

• Is the Multicultural Scholars Program meeting its defined goals and objectives?

• Do participants in the Multicultural Scholars Program perceive the program to be useful and effective?
LITERATURE REVIEW

• Four Sections
  • Underrepresentation
  • Costs and Benefits of Graduate Education
  • Support Programs
  • Multicultural Scholars Program
DEFINING MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

Osteen, Sharpe, and Validestine (2013)

- Term “multiculturalism” hard to define
- Lack of definition makes it difficult to assess multicultural issues in higher education
- Emphasis placed on engaging diversity and difference in practice, including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation
DEFINING MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

Sage (2010)
• Belief of people being distinct in both their qualities and nature, with emphasis on variety

Cai, Crommelin, Drane, Mussi, Shi, & Wechsler (2012)
• In both their qualities and nature, with emphasis on variety
• A “diverse mix of students” could be something as simple as having a majority of women present
DEFINING UNDERREPRESENTATION

For the purpose of our research, underrepresentation is defined as a sample population that does not numerically represent the greater population.

• Multicultural Scholars Program
• Employing specific populations into fields not typically found
  • Examples: white-identified males in the nursing field or female-identified professionals in the STEM fields

LITERATURE REVIEW
Recruitment and Retention

- Percentage of individuals age 18-24 enrolled in a college or university (2008)
  - 44.2% White
  - 32.1% Black
  - 25.8% Hispanic
  - 57.6% Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 21.9% American Indian/Alaska Native

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

• Minority population in 2008 at 75 million and continues to increase (Quarterman, 2008)

• 2008 count by the Census Bureau stated 1 in 4 persons in the U.S. either Asian American, American Indian, African American, or Hispanic American/Latino (Quarterman, 2008)

• United States population is changing rapidly
DISPARITIES

• Graduate education does not represent the changing demographics of the United States

• Diverse students and women still underrepresented in STEM fields (Strayhorn, 2010)

• Gaps in representation even more evident at the doctoral level (Washington, 2007)
SOCIETAL BENEFITS OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

- Students conduct research, makes U.S. more competitive
  - Intellectual property
  - Product development
- Helps produce superior undergraduate education
  - Teaching Assistants
- Fosters successful workforce
- Economic development

(Cohen, 2005)
INDIVIDUAL COSTS OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

The graduate education experience has some financial implications such as:

- Students may not see return on investment (Idemudia & Ferguson, 2013)
- Students borrowing in larger amounts (Dougherty & Woodland, 2009)
- Race and field of study can be factors in determining loan debt (Kim & Otts, 2010)
Many institutions market their racial diversity to prospective students, but few studies have made connections between varying interactions and cultural awareness or racial understanding (Grasmuck & Kim, 2010)
WORKFORCE

• Carries over into workforce (EEOC.gov)
  • White employees earn higher salaries than other groups
  • For every African American employee, four Whites employed in professional categories
The most information on minority graduate preparation was the McNair Scholars Program

- Awards grants
- Many focus many diverse students and low-income, first-generation students
- McNair focuses specifically on getting underrepresented populations into graduate school (Abdul-Alim, 2012)
- McNair helped students find benefits of: academic readiness, time management, creation of a professional network, feelings of acceptance of others, and financial wellness (Willison & Gibson, 2011)
EFFECTIVE GRADUATE SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Aspects of an effective graduate support program:

- Professional development programs
- Training programs (Bonan, 2013)
- Peer mentoring programs (Boyle, 1998)
- Experiential learning (Schram, 2012)
- Cohorts
HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

• Program began in 1993; included a stipend
• Dr. Ruth Washington (2006)
• Summer research program
  • Undergraduate students from underrepresented groups to gain research experience at UConn
  • Program aimed at recruiting undergraduate students to UConn Graduate School
  • Feedback helped make the program year-round, with monetary compensation, workshops, and trainings
CURRENT MULTICULTURAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

- Current iteration started in 2011
- Program includes:
  - Stipend
  - Mentorship Program
  - Workshops and Socials
  - Professional Development Programs
  - Mandatory Meetings
  - Orientation
METHODOLOGY
The University of Connecticut (UConn)  
  - Four-year  
  - Research I  
  - Predominantly White Institution  
  - Over 18,000 students at main campus (Storrs, CT)  

Graduate School  
  - Over 6500 students in certificate, master’s, and doctoral programs at main campus  
  - Over 88 fields of study  

Multicultural Scholars Programs  
  - Approximately 65-70 students in the program each academic year
METHODOLOGY

• Participants were identified through electronic records of students in the Multicultural Scholars Program from 2007-2014
  • 122 current and past participants were invited via email
  • 36 completed survey
    • Translates to a response rate of 29.5%
  • 7 participants completed either phone or Skype interviews
  • Participants represented the years we targeted
PARTICIPANTS’ FIELDS OF STUDY

- STEM: 17
- Health Care: 5
- Arts and Humanities: 3
- Business: 1
- Other (Non-Disclosed): 1
- Other - Political Science: 1
- Other - Social Sciences: 2
- Education: 1

PARTICIPANTS
METHODOLOGY

• Data collection strategies were based on a convergent parallel model

• Multicultural Scholars were invited to share their experiences in both quantitative and qualitative opportunities:
  • The 27 item quantitative survey was constructed by the research team and made available for completion through Campus Labs
  • The qualitative measures were:
    • 7 open ended questions on the survey
    • 11 open ended interview questions; interviews conducted by they research team members
METHODOLOGY

• Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

• Open ended survey responses were coded (open coding) by all members of the research team individually.

• Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were coded (open coding) by two members of the research team.

• After compiling all individual coding, the research team convened as a whole to discuss and determine themes.
TRUSTWORTHINESS

• Triangulation
  • Convergent Parallel Model

• Independent coding with peer debriefing

• Open-ended questions

• Used well-established methods
RESULTS & FINDINGS
DID YOU FINISH THE PROGRAM?

Total Respondents: 31

- Yes: 23%
- No, Current students: 68%
- Abstain: 6%
- Unsure: 3%
IF YOU GAINED EMPLOYMENT IN YOUR FIELD, ARE YOU CURRENTLY STILL IN THAT FIELD?

100%

Of participants who gained employment in their respective field, were retained
Orientation

- 29 responses
- 15 respondents found useful
- 1 respondent found not useful

PERCEIVED USEFULNESS

UCONN
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
Orientation

Enjoyable: 3%
Neutral: 7%
This wasn't a program component: 27%
Not enjoyable: 36%
I can't remember: 27%
Monthly Meetings

- 30 responses
- 9 respondents found useful
- 2 respondents found not useful

USEFULNESS

UConn The Graduate School
Monthly Meetings

- Enjoyable: 60%
- Neutral: 30%
- Not enjoyable: 7%
- This wasn't a program component: 3%

ENJOYMENT
Professional Development Events

- 30 responses
- 16 respondents found useful
- 1 respondent found not useful
Professional Development Events

- Enjoyable: 47%
- Neutral: 3%
- Not enjoyable: 10%
- I can't remember: 17%
- This wasn't a program component: 3%
- I didn't go: 20%
Faculty Meetings

- 30 responses
- 7 respondents found useful
- 0 respondents found not useful
Coordinator Meetings

- 30 responses
- 12 respondents found useful
- 0 respondents found not useful

USEFULNESS

UCONN
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
Stipend

- 23/29 respondents found stipend at least adequate
- 2 found stipend not at all adequate

SATISFACTION

UCONN
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
Professional Preparation

- 11/22 respondents felt program prepared them for work
- 2 found program did not prepare them at all

SATISFACTION

UConn
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
Program Satisfaction

- 21/26 respondents were at least satisfied with the program
- 2 were dissatisfied

SATISFACTION
Diversifying Fields

Extremely Well □ Pretty Well □ Somewhat □ Neutral □ Not at all

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Legend:
- Extremely Well
- Pretty Well
- Somewhat
- Neutral
- Not at all
RESULTS

• 52.17 % said MSP prepared them for the workforce

• 77.73 % were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the program overall

• 72.78 % perceive MSP meets its goal of diversifying fields where certain populations are underrepresented
FINDINGS

After coding qualitative data, five themes emerged:
THEMES

• Money
• Mentorship
• Community
• Professional Development
• Diversity
MONEY

Definition:
• Participants were given an annual fellowship that covered half of their graduate tuition and a $2000 summer stipend. Students were able to TA half-time, allowing students to focus on research.

Finding:
• The fellowship and stipend were useful and helpful to the scholars
“During my tenure at UConn, there was no formal structure to the program, but it was a funding resource for Multicultural Scholars participants to complete our studies.”

“The summer stipend was a great help, and at times my only means of summer support.”

“The funding support was extremely helpful every semester. Thanks!”
MENTORSHIP

Definition:
• Newly admitted scholars were paired with continuing scholars for a mentoring relationship

Findings:
• Some students found it beneficial, but others have provided recommendations for improvement
EVIDENCE

• The mentorship aspect was stated as “really a fantastic idea for both sides...”

• It is the requirement that “gives you time to have a conversation with someone who has better experience than you”
• “Even as an older student, it is helpful to connect to newer students and know that neither one of us is alone.”

• “The mentorship by MSP Scholars who have been in the program and are able to share advice with us.”
EVIDENCE

• Scholars may benefit if they get their “mentors from the fourth or fifth year...so that they can have a little bit more flexible time.”

• “More consistency in the mentorship program will help a lot, but also try to use mentors who have time.”
COMMUNITY

Definition:
• An environment of support and guidance from peers, staff, and faculty fostered through socializing and networking opportunities for students

Findings:
• The community was positive and supportive for the scholars
“Keeping us together more often is a good idea...they should continue that.”

“It may be good to have a get together as a group a little more often...it could create a sense of community.”

“A lot of the activities done in the monthly meetings aspired at cohort bondings, which I found very helpful.”
Most Useful or Enjoyable Part of Program Answers:

- “Meeting a good amount of people”
- “Camaraderie and support”
- “To meet other multicultural scholars”
- “Be connected with other grad students with similar backgrounds”
Why Students Participated in MSP:

- “This group is the family I have been looking for.”
- “My continued participation is based on the sense of community…”
- “Opportunity to meet others”

Students Not in Current Program

- “It would have been nice if there was like some type of community kind of built around the program,” and “it would have been beneficial to meet others.”
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Definition:
• Programs and workshops designed to develop professional skills

Findings:
• Students felt that these opportunities were useful but limited in time variability.
EVIDENCE

• One student explained, “...it seemed like a good way to get professional development as a student of color, because I wasn’t getting that at other institutions I was at.”

• “…most of them (events) are probably scheduled on a certain day, be in a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday… and you happen to have full days on those days.”
EVIDENCE

• “I definitely think the professional development aspects of the program... were the most useful parts of the program.”

• “There has been little support from faculty of color. Brown bags with the usual 2 suspects hardly counts...”
DIVERSITY

Definition:
• The representation of the students in the program diversifying fields where certain groups are underrepresented

Findings:
• Perceptions were mixed
They are those who felt that the program did diversify fields:

- “The program meets its goals—Anthropology is majority white, so the program was a benefit in my specific field of study.”

- “I do feel that there are more underrepresented (Black, Latino, and Native American) grad students than when I first began my program, but there are just so few overall anything would be an improvement!”

- “Yes because it help us... you know....knowing that even if we are minorities at UConn, we can you know do it in new ways. We can achieve just as high...I think it serves its purpose.”
There were those who did not feel that the program is diversifying fields:

• Recruiting more diverse students and administrators of color is not a priority [within their department], and for them, this is “disappointing.”

• “I think, um, on a very shallow level, it does. Because you know you're giving money to students um who are underrepresented within a field to come to your school. Now, whether or not you are able to retain them is a completely different story…I don't think the program does enough to retain.”
Then, there were those who were uncertain:

- “I couldn’t really judge on this because I haven’t met anyone who’s been in the program and gone into the field.”
- “I'm not sure if it does or if it doesn't. I am not sure if they are recruiting underrepresented minorities, because if they are then, yes.”
DISCUSSION

• Participants are satisfied with the Multicultural Scholars Program and find components of the program enjoyable and useful

• Participants found the fellowship and stipend adequate and useful

• Participants are not sure if the program is meeting its goal of diversifying fields

• Restructuring the program with added components will increased its perceived value to students.
DISCUSSION

• Mentorship
  • Provide expectations for both mentors and mentees to ensure consistency and quality of experience

• Professional Development
  • Become more flexible in planning events, as some days of the week are busier than others
  • If possible, offer make up options for missed opportunities
  • Ask students and alumni for feedback on what they would like for professional development programs
DISCUSSION

- Meetings
  - Develop intentional outcomes for faculty meetings

- Track national trends and adjust recruitment strategies as needed
  - Shifts in representation over the past 10-15 years
  - Consistent and new populations that are under-represented

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE
DISCUSSION

• A prior assessments was conducted, but we did not have access to it.

• We were able to collect participant contact information from the past seven cohorts (2007-2014)

• Hard to measure outcomes, as the program model has changed over time

LIMITATIONS
DISCUSSION

- Future Assessments
  - Determine methods for improvement
  - Enhance/ invest more resources
  - Adjust requirements to increase competitiveness
  - Present findings and outcomes on a national level
- Apply for grants
- Surveys
  - Exit
  - Comprehensive for all current scholars
- Compile a comprehensive list of all current and past scholars
- Conduct benchmark assessments
  - Peer and Aspirant institutions
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QUESTIONS?