

April 2007

DRAFT: Diversity in Washington Higher Education **(Information Item)**

Introduction

In September 2006, the Higher Education Coordination Board approved a report titled, *Diversity in Washington Higher Education*. The report was produced by staff following a series of public forums and meetings held in the spring of 2006.

The report recommends the state develop a systemic diversity plan for higher education, but it does not spell out how this should happen. In addition, recommendations in the report do not reflect consensus among the various higher education institutions. Both are needed if the diversity report is to have strength and purpose in the long term.

In approving the report, the Board was mindful of Initiative 200 (I-200), approved by Washington voters in 1998, which expressly prohibits state and local agencies from discriminating against or granting preferential treatment to any individual or group based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, education, or contracting.

I-200 does not prevent governmental agencies from implementing programs that are consistent with the mission and purpose of higher education or efforts to provide equal access to all of Washington's students.

Data in the report point to significant disparities, when comparing by race and ethnicity, the number and percentage of college-age Washington students who participate in and complete a college education, and who participate in graduate and professional programs. The report also notes that African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be from poor families, and thus, often face additional barriers to college attendance and persistence.

In addition to issues related to student enrollment and completion, the report also examines faculty and staff employment. The report finds disparities in employment and retention of faculty of color in our colleges and universities.

To address these disparities, the diversity report contains recommendations that range from conducting discrete programs and activities at the campus level, to calling for system-wide change and accountability at the state level. Several of the recommendations are narrowly targeted to encourage enrollment, retention, and completion of specific underrepresented student groups; or recruitment, and retention and promotion of faculty and staff of color.

Others, such as coordination of pre-college programs and creation of additional student outreach programs, are broader in purpose (currently the case in the “GEAR UP” program), and would benefit students who face a wide range of barriers to higher education.

Following publication of the September 2006 diversity report, Board staff met with representatives of some of the baccalaureate institutions to consider what is needed to develop and implement a comprehensive and systemic diversity plan for higher education in Washington state.

All agreed that many of the campus-based activities or programs recommended in the report can be and, in some cases, are being offered by individual institutions. A comprehensive and systemic diversity plan will require commitment and involvement by the state’s higher education leaders, e.g., presidents and boards of regents/trustees of the state’s colleges and universities, and state boards of higher education.

To this end, staff recommend that the Board’s 10-year master plan for higher education, scheduled for adoption in December 2007:

- Incorporate diversity as essential to the mission of higher education in Washington state;
- Promote policies to encourage higher education access considering: changing demographic trends, differing levels of academic preparation, and economic disadvantage;
- Integrate a comprehensive and systemic diversity strategy that calls for policy guidance and resources at the state level, and implementation at the institutional level; and
- Establish a system of accountability that includes clear indicators and benchmarks as well as aggressive goals for improvement in student access and completion, and employment, retention, and promotion of faculty and staff of color.

Next Steps

Development of a systematic diversity plan for higher education will be integrated into the board’s master planning process. The HECB will engage a broad cross section of state educational stakeholders in review and analysis of the 2006 diversity report and develop recommendations for consideration by the full Board.

As stated above, the diversity report recommendations reflect both statewide and campus-based programs or activities that can be or are being practiced. These recommendations should be carefully reviewed and analyzed by a workgroup composed of diversity practitioners and professionals in our colleges and universities. Based on this review and analysis the workgroup would address:

- Policies that would encourage and support diversity efforts at the campus level and at the state level;
- Activities that are essential and/or proven effective; and therefore, should be practiced statewide; and
- An accountability monitoring system with clearly defined indicators and benchmarks.