



TEN INEXPENSIVE STRATEGIES TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN STUDENTS OF COLOR

By Dr. Charles A. Taylor

Here are a few clearly defined steps that educators and administrators can take to attract students of color and create an atmosphere conducive to lower dropout rates and increased graduation rates for students.

These suggestions are designed to be easily integrated into any university's current recruitment and retention strategies. Furthermore, they are part of a more comprehensive approach to recruitment and retention, by involving not only the students themselves, but also their families, their communities both on and off campus, and faculty. This multi-pronged strategy helps to create a whole network of support, positivity, and awareness for each student, as well as a reputation for the university as a diverse, welcoming, and accommodating institution.

1. Personalized Letter Sent to Parents of Freshman Students

Parents are influential in creating an atmosphere that has a strong effect on how children value education and higher learning. Surveys that we have conducted confirm that freshmen college students are still greatly influenced by their parents. A personal, friendly letter of introduction allows you to establish contact with a student's parent(s), and possibly channel some of that influence to increase their child's involvement on campus. This technique has worked quite well for a number of administrators.

The importance of getting parents involved can be underscored to a greater extent based on a study conducted by Herndon and Hirt (2004). This study specifically indicates the stronger dependence of black students upon black families for support during the post-secondary education phase, as opposed to their white counterparts. These findings suggest that due to the effect of parental involvement on student's performance, it is of primary importance for colleges to establish networks with the parents of black students.

2. Positive Press Releases Mailed to Hometown Papers

There are few things as motivating as good publicity. One positive story in a student's hometown paper (sent out by a college's Public Affairs Office) has proven effective in increasing retention rates. Once the publicity hits home and students have been congratulated by hometown friends, they tend to strive even harder on campus. This strategy could have long term-benefits not just for the retention of current students by increasing their morale, but also by increasing aspirations among others from their neighborhoods.

Stewart, Stewart and Simons (2007) demonstrated that it is not just micro level factors, but neighborhood characteristics such as crime rates, violence, and the like, that have a significant impact on the college aspirations of adolescents. In such an environment, positive press



releases about students doing well in college could enhance the aspirations and goals of the adolescents of color in their hometown.

3. Regular Articles in the Campus Student Newspaper

I created two stacks of campus student newspapers when I was researching a recent book. One stack had articles (other than sports or crime) about blacks and the other stack did not. The stack that did not have any articles about blacks was about five times the size of the stack that did. After looking at hundreds of such publications, you begin to wonder why students of color are missing from the press. If any publication should reflect diversity, it's the campus newspaper at an institution of higher learning. When students see themselves, their friends, and their culture given coverage in a variety of settings, they tend to feel a part of the campus.

In a thesis comparing the coverage of students of color across two university newspapers, Hayton (2010) concludes that despite a slightly higher representation of various communities of color in the more diverse university, people of color continued to be represented through a stereotypical lens, thus casting them as 'outsiders' as opposed to the majority white student population. Invisibility of students of color in college media would only perpetuate invisibility of these students on campus, both in the minds of their white colleagues and in their own perceptions.

The effect of student newspapers on the organizational, cultural, and political atmosphere of a college campus can hardly be overstated (Altbach, 2007). Not only are school newspapers the key means of imparting information and shaping opinions on college campuses, they could also be the most important student organization on campus.

4. Involving Student Organizations of Color

Student organizations represent experience, talent, and bundles of energy. When properly channeled, these organizations can help the university in recruiting and retaining students. Campuses that provide student organizations with leadership and similar developmental training find the investment pays off. Maldonado et al. (2005) examined the theoretical underpinnings of student-led retention efforts by analyzing student-initiated retention projects on two campuses. They discovered how important it is for students themselves to act as agents of social and institutional change and how this involvement improved the campus.

In a recent study focusing on identity formation among male black college students, Harper and Quaye (2007) found that being part of student organizations and assuming leadership roles had a significant impact on becoming comfortable with one's blackness among the research participants. By putting students in responsible positions, and honoring them for their achievements, it would not only serve as a role model for other students of color but also enhance the academic potential of students as well.

5. Create a Student Advisory Council for Students of Color



When there are few student organizations and little participation in student government and residence halls, an advisory council can fill the void. A representative council can help increase student interaction and participation. Depending on the level of involvement that student organizations or councils have in the governance structure, they could end up having long lasting effects, not just on college campuses, but society in general (Altbach, 2007).

The role of students in the civil rights movement is considerable proof of the need for student involvement in governance across higher education institutions. At times, student representatives may be the only advocates for students' interests. The presence of students of color on advisory councils becomes even more pertinent in such instances to assure that underrepresented voices are heard in the decision-making processes that affect campus climate for all students.

6. Encourage a Student 'Replacement' Campaign

Organizations for students of color can be encouraged to sponsor a campaign in which inclined graduating seniors, and students deciding not to come back to school, attempt to replace themselves with another student. Successful students can be honored at end-of-year student-sponsored banquets. Student organizations have to assume the leadership role for this strategy to effectively work.

7. Create a Permanent Retention Committee

A standing retention committee ensures the issues are receiving the attention they deserve while involving faculty directly in the process. Faculty members have a unique position in a student's life since they wield authority, provide mentoring and guidance, and serve as a role model for students. Their importance in retaining students cannot be overemphasized. Students report higher levels of satisfaction with better student-faculty interaction (McArthur, 2005).

Faculty-student contact leads to greater engagement among students, which eventually leads to higher retention rates. It is therefore key to formally create a faculty committee to specifically assist with ALANA student recruitment and retention on campus.

8. Sponsor 'Get Acquainted Meetings' by Gender

Years ago, Black faculty and staff on the Newark Rutgers University campus devised a program for black males to get together. A directory of black students by class and major was compiled and used by students to form study groups. Social activities, mentor relationships and new friendships were the outcome. A similar group was formed for women. Both groups were actively involved in retention efforts. Although this was in the past, it is included here because it's still relevant today. Friendships contribute to a feeling of belonging.



Analyzing the long-term effect of mentoring on higher education outcomes for students, based on a sample of 339 undergraduate students, Campbell and Campbell (2007) observed a significantly higher level of academic success and retention associated with mentoring. Furthermore, students who were mentored by same-ethnicity mentors showed a higher cumulative GPA and a higher graduation rate.

9. Create a 'Town-Gown' Committee

Students may avoid some colleges because of the reputation of the town. Institutions located in small or rural communities face even greater challenges. A town-gown committee can help smooth the transition for students. Members of town-gown committees serve as liaisons between a college and the surrounding community.

Sometimes they can help mediate disputes, but mostly they are in place in order to improve the relationship between a school and the outside community by producing town guides for students, discussing issues of mutual interest, and promoting both college and community events, for example.

10. Involve African American Alumni

Campuses can create an organization for alumni of color. Such organizations raise funds, sponsor annual workshops and conferences, and help recruit and retain both faculty and students.

Singer and Hughey (2002), in a detailed overview of student alumni associations, pointed out numerous ways in which fostering student alumni relationships leads to beneficial outcomes for both the institutions that fosters such relationships and for the currently enrolled students.

This article and all references used can be found in the book: *Effective Ways to Recruit and Retain African American Students* by Dr. Charles A. Taylor. [You can get your copy here.](#)

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