

The University of Montana Western

Diversity Report, October 2009

The University of Montana Western's commitment to increasing diversity and improving awareness of diversity on campus is grounded in Objective 5 of the Strategic Plan ("Increase diversity to enrich the intellectual experience at the university"). The objective features five action items of the highest priority.

The first action item is "**Increase enrollment and retention of a more diverse student body.**" The percentage of students of color has risen for 5.7 percent in 1999 to 9.5 percent in 2008. The majority of students of color are from the Polynesian Islands and Hawaii. Recruitment of Polynesian students began with the efforts of Hawaiian former football coach, Tommy Lee, and have subsequently increased as Admissions Office counselors now regularly visit Hawaii to recruit in high schools and at college fairs.

Overall fall-to-fall retention of first time bachelors degree-seeking students has increased from 51 percent in 2003, prior to the full implementation of Experience One, to 74 percent in the fifth year of Experience One. We believe that retention rates for students of color and first generation and low income students have increased along with overall retention, but we have not consistently broken out retention rates by race and ethnicity.

Montana Western's TRiO office, however, serves 160 first generation, low income, and disabled students, as well as students of color, and reports retention rates comparable to those for the campus overall.

The second action item is "**Increase the diversity of faculty and staff.**" The Admissions Office has hired a Latina UMW graduate as an admissions counselor, while the Office of Student Success hired a Director of the Learning Center and Career Services with extensive multicultural experience, especially through Peace Corps work in the Solomon Islands. The Department of Business and Technology hired a faculty member from Austria in order to enhance the international dimensions of its curriculum.

The third action item is "**Increase travel and study abroad opportunities for students and faculty.**" 2007-10 travel abroad experiential learning trips include visits to Italy, Ireland, the Galapagos Islands, eastern Europe (especially Berlin and Prague), and Italy and Greece. Travelers include students, family members, faculty and staff.

The fourth action item is "**Participate in the MUS program for Montana's Indian Education for All Act.**" The Department of Education continues to integrate American Indian content into all of its courses. The university continues to offer American Indian-focused courses, especially in the Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences.

A new proposal for the revision of Montana Western's General Education program argues that all students should be required to take one four-credit course that addresses the concerns expressed in the Indian Education for All Act.

The fifth action item is **“Promote an increased understanding of gender, ethnicity and multiculturalism across campus.”** As noted in previous reports, the Department of Literature and Writing's “Dances with Words” speaker series, as well as its Visiting Writer series, both continue to bring distinguished queer writers and writers of color to campus for public performances. Similarly, the Dillon Concert Association and the Southwest Montana Arts Commission, both actively supported by the participation of UMW faculty and staff, bring international performers and performers of color to the Beier Auditorium several times each year.

The university continues to sponsor increasingly sophisticated and successful luaus during Spring semester, featuring Polynesian food, and music and dance performed by the Polynesian Dancers, under the direction of Dr. Judy Ulrich. The Polynesian Dancers continue to perform at K-12 schools, pow wows, international awareness days at the University of Montana-Missoula, and at other venues, including the state house. The success of the troupe, and the increased academic interest in Polynesian culture and arts have persuaded Dr. Ulrich to develop a proposal for a multicultural arts minor.

In other diversity activities, Student Affairs, with the leadership of an AmeriCorps volunteer, organized a highly successful “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” event, during which students, staff, and faculty walked along Atlantic Avenue wearing high heels to increase awareness of the importance of combating violence against women. The Lambda Alliance continues to support queer and questioning students, as well as raising awareness, especially by hosting events during National Coming Out Week in October.

Finally, the General Education Committee, after eighteen months of deliberation, has proposed a revision of the general education program which requires all students to take four credits of course work with an American Indian focus, and eight further credits with multicultural and global content. The proposal will be discussed and voted upon by the appropriate committees this Fall, and, if passed, will do much to increase commitment to and awareness of diversity among all UMW's constituents.

Dr. Brian Price

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UMW