

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER IN  
ITS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF MINORITY STUDENTS

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by  
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## Abstract

This research will paper will discuss not only the importance of having a Multicultural Educational Resource Center (MERC) as the one here at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. It will also discuss the effectiveness MERC has on the recruitment and retention of students of color. The purpose of MERC is to increase the visibility and retention of students from historically underrepresented groups, improve the campus climate for students of color, and increase the diversity and racial competency at UWP. Making the transition for students of color to Southwestern Wisconsin more comfortable and giving them a venue to receive academic aid, personal and social guidance, and overall a “like home” atmosphere.

## Problem Statement

When I graduated high school in the year 2002 I was excited to just have received an athletic scholarship to play football at the University of Northern Michigan. I was unprepared and unaware of the culture shock that lied ahead. Coming from the city of Milwaukee, WI and a high school where the student body and staff combined was comprised of about 96% African Americans; I headed to a university where people of color were scarce. This created a very uncomfortable campus climate outside of football, because the majority of students of color that attended the university were either also on the football team or involved in another sport. Almost 7 hours away from home in the upper peninsula of Michigan, without a car or a cell phone I felt so alone. Without being a part of the football team this transition would have really been difficult. Because they helped with the registration process, finding classes, where to buy my books from and all the other things a first year student goes through within the first weeks of college.

I tell this story because it wasn't until I transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville that I realized places like the MERC office actually existed. A place like this at NMU would have made that transition so much better for so many of its students of color. There I just felt like a member of the football team, not a student at the University. There wasn't a venue to discuss my experiences of racism, or the feelings of being the only student of color in a lecture with over 200 students. No place to access literature to better understand how to navigate through this uncomfortable state.

## Introduction

The Multicultural Educational Resource Center provided a not only a place to discuss these issues affecting students of color, but they also reached out to the general student population and staff through open forums to improve the campus climate and allow a safe venue for these conversations to take place. Through MERC I was introduced to the Black Student Union which I joined, they now also offer tutoring services, the writing center send representatives over to MERC to help any students there with their papers. They offer Mentoring programs to give back to the community, and they also offer some jobs for students. It's a place where students can let their hair down and be themselves without feeling the pressures of representing your whole race with every move you make. The office is also comprised of a staff which has a director, three advisors which also recruit, and a secretary with a graduate assistant which I currently hold as my position within MERC.

## Literature Review

MERC has done a great job in the recruitment and retention of students of color. They have increased the rates of enrollment, those that apply, and admissions which is displayed in these charts. (MERC website)

**Table 1: New Freshmen Applications by Race/Ethnicity to UW-Platteville, 2002-03 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Applying for Summer/Fall Term of:				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
African American	36	50	59	117	221
Hispanic/Latino	31	34	30	39	51
American Indian	10	11	14	19	20
Asian	52	42	56	55	50
White/Unknown	2,367	2,699	2,754	2,896	2,966
International	22	18	20	22	22
Total	2,518	2,854	2,933	3,148	3,330

**Table 2: New Freshmen Admits by Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville, 2002-03 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Admitted for Summer/Fall Term of:				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
African American	17	20	23	53	118
Hispanic/Latino	21	19	23	29	31
American Indian	10	9	11	13	13
Asian	36	29	42	43	35
White/Unknown	2,135	2,179	2,361	2,525	2,598
International	13	3	3	10	9
Total	2,232	2,259	2,463	3,673	3,804

**Table 3: Enrolled New Freshmen by Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville, 2002-03 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Enrolled for Fall Term of:				
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
African American	9	4	16	16	54
Hispanic/Latino	10	10	13	10	15
American Indian	7	5	6	5	5
Asian	14	12	11	15	12
White/Unknown	1,082	1,104	1,154	1,198	1,351
International	4	1	2	2	1
Total	1,126	1,136	1,202	1,246	1,438

**Table 5: New Freshmen Enroll Rate by Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville, 2002-03 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Enrolled for Fall Term of:					Average 5 Year Enroll Rate	Regression Slope of Enroll Rate on Year: A measure of trend*
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07		
African American	52.9%	20.0%	69.6%	30.2%	45.8%	43.7%	-0.42%
Hispanic/Latino	47.6%	52.6%	56.5%	34.5%	48.4%	47.9%	-1.66%
American Indian	70.0%	55.6%	54.5%	38.5%	38.5%	51.4%	-8.02%
Asian	38.9%	41.4%	26.2%	34.9%	34.3%	35.1%	-1.57%
White/Unknown	50.7%	50.7%	48.9%	47.4%	52.0%	49.9%	-0.06%
International	30.8%	33.3%	66.7%	20.0%	11.1%	32.4%	-5.26%
Total	50.4%	50.3%	48.8%	46.6%	51.3%	49.5%	-0.20%

\*Note: a slope near zero indicates no change over time; a positive slope indicates improvement, and a negative slope indicates decline.

**Table 6: New Freshmen Enrolled by Detailed Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville, 1996-97 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Fall term of the 10th day of Academic Year					
	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
African American	8	9	4	16	16	54
American Indian	1	7	5	6	5	5
Hispanic/Latino	11	10	10	13	10	15
International	4	4	1	2	2	1
Other Asian American	7	12	10	6	6	5
SE Asian American	2	2	2	5	9	7
White/Unknown	1,061	1,082	1,104	1,154	1,198	1,351
Total	1,094	1,126	1,136	1,202	1,246	1,438

**Table 8: Undergraduate Students Enrolled by Detailed Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville, 1996-97 through 2006-07**

Race/Ethnicity	Fall term of the 10th day of Academic Year					
	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
African American	52	55	47	58	56	100
American Indian	10	17	14	17	25	21
Hispanic/Latino	38	41	38	48	41	59
International	45	44	54	40	44	42
Other Asian American	51	63	52	47	42	42
SE Asian American	7	9	11	15	22	24
White/Unknown	5,103	5,322	5,363	5,383	5,579	5,787
Total	5,306	5,551	5,579	5,608	5,809	6,075

**Table 10: First-to-Second Year Retention of New Freshmen Entering Full-Time by Race/Ethnicity at UW-Platteville**

Year & Term	Metrics	Race/Ethnicity							
		Total	African American	American Indian	South-East Asian	Other Asian	Hispanic/Latino	Students of Color	White
Fall 1997	Cohort#	978	8	6	2	9	11	36	940
	Rate (%)	75.1	75	*	*	*	72.7	66.7	75.4
Fall 1998	Cohort#	1,118	18	7	1	8	10	44	1,070
	Rate (%)	78.7	77.8	*	*	75	*	65.9	79.4
Fall 1999	Cohort#	1,093	11	3	2	11	6	33	1,059
	Rate (%)	76.6	*	*	*	81.8	*	57.6	77.2
Fall 2000	Cohort#	958	7	1	1	10	7	26	925
	Rate (%)	74.8	*	*	*	80	85.7	76.9	74.8
Fall 2001	Cohort#	1,039	6	1	2	7	9	25	1,010
	Rate (%)	76.1	*	*	*	85.7	*	72	76.3

Fall 2002	Cohort#	1,120	9	7	2	12	10	40	1,076
	Rate (%)	80.7	66.7	*	*	66.7	60	62.5	81.5
Fall 2003	Cohort#	1,116	4	5	2	10	10	31	1,084
	Rate (%)	77.3	*	*	*	80	60	64.5	77.8
Fall 2004	Cohort#	1,164	11	5	5	6	12	39	1,123
	Rate (%)	75.9	*	*	*	*	50	46.2	77
Fall 2005	Cohort#	1,218	15	5	9	6	9	44	1,172
	Rate (%)	76.6	66.7	*	77.8	*	77.8	68.2	76.9

Notes:

1. Table 10 is data provided by UW System Office of Policy Analysis and Research for Plan 2008 (Distributed in January, 2007).
2. an "\*" Indicates five or fewer students were retained to the second year.

## Discussion

MERC continues to increase the number of students enrolling at UWP, while also increasing the numbers that graduate. MERC is also increasing the number of students' going on to graduate school here at UWP and other Masters Programs.

The model that MERC uses here at UWP should be replicated throughout the UW system, and also throughout the country. The low number of college students from historically underrepresented groups is a national problem. UWP has taken an aggressive and positive approach to tackling this issue. Increasing your student and staff diversity isn't enough in itself, because the university needs to be prepared to handle these increases when they do happen. That's where offices like MERC would be very beneficial in working with the staff and students to ensure that the campus is welcoming, prepared, and safe for an increase of students of color.

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