

Plan will increase number of ethnic-minority students

APA's Board of Directors supports the commission's vision.

By Tori DeAngelis
Monitor Staff

An APA commission released its final report in November with a far reaching, practical plan to increase the number of ethnic-minority psychology students and faculty at colleges and universities.

The Commission on Ethnic Minority Recruitment, Retention and Training in Psychology (CEMRRAT) was the brainchild of 1994 APA president Ronald Fox, PhD, who appointed the commission's members and asked them to assess the status of and barriers to ethnic-minority participation in psychology. He also instructed the group to create a five-year plan to guide APA efforts in the area.

'From the start, getting a signal from the president of APA that this is a top priority was crucial to our success,' said Richard Suinn, PhD, the Colorado State University professor who chaired the commission.

During its two years of operation, CEMRRAT:

- Produced a five-year plan that gives detailed strategies for how APA boards, committees and the central office can implement it, including ways to help psychology educators and researchers become actively involved in multicultural issues;
- Began producing eight pamphlets that provide practical solutions to recruitment and retention issues for a variety of audiences from the high school to postdoctoral levels. Two of those pamphlets are already printed, and APA's Board just recommended allocating additional funds to produce the rest;
- Won two grants from the Center for Mental Health Services and the National Institute of General Medical Sciences that will boost efforts to produce more minority psychologists (see sidebar);
- Placed stories in the national media about the importance of recruiting for diversity, and ways to do such recruiting;

- Conducted a survey that will result in a directory of multi-cultural experts for use by schools and other institutions; and
- Created a sourcebook of vital statistics on the status of minority recruitment and retention efforts and on significant research articles addressing that issue. Those data show, for example, that ethnic-minority faculty in psychology graduate departments increased from only 5.5 percent to 6.5 percent between 1981 and 1994, and that ethnic-minorities made up only 10 percent of psychology PhD recipients in 1991.

Strategies for action

The commission's five-year plan outlines a long-term strategy for how psychology departments can respond better to faculty and students of color, said Bertha Holliday, PhD, APA staff liaison to the commission and director of APA's Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs.

The plan--which includes specific action items and a timetable to implement them--calls for:

- APA to be a leader and to provide resource materials on diversity in recruitment and retention to other professional and scientific associations and human-service agencies;
- Publishers, high schools, colleges and universities to make sure introductory psychology textbooks appropriately address cultural diversity;
- University research departments and programs to examine and change their training procedures so they are friendly to students of color; and
- Practice groups to develop multicultural practice competencies through training, continuing education, licensing criteria and accreditation criteria.

More support

The commission received a boost in December, when APA's Board of Directors approved three items introduced by CEMRRAT to be considered this month for approval by APA's Council of Representatives.

Contingent on that approval, the board approved CEMRRAT's five-year plan and directed APA's boards and committees to look into the plan's feasibility. The board also recommended that APA Council allocate \$15,000 from its 1997 contingency fund to help implement the plan, and authorized APA's chief executive officer to identify funding sources starting in 1998 to support its initiatives.

In its own separate motion, the board also asked for council to approve an extra board allocation of \$13,450 to continue publishing the brochures.

From its start in 1994, CEMMRAT took a different tack from many working groups, Suinn said.

'We vowed not to repeat the pattern of producing reports that gathered dust on a shelf, and instead, to get right into an action plan,' Suinn said. The 15-member commission accomplished that goal by setting up working groups to create useable products as well as a long-term vision for ethnic-minority recruitment and retention, he said.

The committee's composition helped to ensure that action would remain central, he added. All of its members have expertise in research and practice in diversity issues and in ethnic-minority recruitment and retention. In addition, its liaisons, who represented a range of APA boards, divisions and government entities, participated in the working groups. Their active participation was unusual because most liaisons usually serve as observers, he said.

Suinn helped encourage the commission's action-oriented agenda.

'My attitude was, 'Look folks, you can't just come in and work in a work group, then go home," he said. 'Once you leave and get on the airplane, you're going to continue your dedication to this mission.'

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