

Understanding Minority Education in Pharmacy

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At Xavier University, we have a saying, "there is no such thing as problems, only opportunities."

SUMMARY. Minority education is an economic, societal and altruistic issue. One out of every three wage earners, by the year 2000, will be minorities. If a large percentage of these individuals are not economically empowered, societal productivity and social security, among other things, will suffer greatly. Pharmacy offers an excellent opportunity for economic advancement.

The key to success in multicultural pharmaceutical education is commitment—long-term, unwavering commitment. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have shown this strategy to be most effective. Majority institutions need to emulate some of their tactics in order to succeed.

Different types of support groups are needed by students in order to increase their chances for success. Academic, professional and social networks are each very important ingredients. Also, cultural sensitivity toward all students is paramount. It makes the individual feel and act important.

Ethnic diversity is healthy and good. Striving to achieve it is not easy, but well worth the effort. Using many of the suggestions from the entire special volume, institutions desiring to endeavor into this meaningful and rewarding activity (i.e., increasing the number of minority pharmacists) can and will succeed. Early science-education pipelines, the Carolyn Brown effect and the nature of commitment are but some of the advice offered.

Read well, take notes, call for additional information and try, by all means, try—all students and the profession will benefit.

The purpose of this special edition devoted to "Multicultural Pharmaceutical Education" was to bring the spotlight better into focus on an

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important topic and to present a collection of ideas on what minority education is about. In this, we have succeeded. Thirteen articles have discussed various aspects of the subject. Commitment, concern and courage have been addressed.

For the attuned reader, this compilation has provided valuable suggestions on how to increase the chances of success in improving a track record of attracting and retaining minority students. Others have gleaned information that will benefit their institution in establishing a long-term goal of expanding the pool of minority pharmacists or postbaccalaureate graduates. Many barriers have been detailed along with the means to overcome them.

INTRODUCTION

The societal marketplace in the United States will be different in the future not only for higher education, but also for goods and services. Minorities will soon make up the majority. The impact of this phenomena will be awe inspiring and potentially devastating, especially if actions are not taken now anticipating these changes.

The low availability of skilled workers already threatens some industries and our international competitive posture. More groups are pursuing smaller numbers of potential students and employees. Pharmacy schools must compete with engineering and other health professional programs as well as environmental and biotechnology interests. The pool of qualified applicants is dwindling in some areas. It has already been predicted that before the turn of the century 45 percent of all students will be classified as nontraditional (older, part-time, etc.). Colleges of pharmacy are already being affected by these changes. Failing to recognize these and plan for the future is planning to fail.

The renewed interest in minority issues as they relate to pharmaceutical education is, in a few cases, genuine altruism for the plight of the disenfranchised. However, for the most part, this concern is brought about by legislative or public pressures and by the need to expand the availability of potential students. While not as socially redeeming as the first reason, the second motivation is real and valid, and can be mutually beneficial to both the institution and minority students if handled properly.

Still others are preparing for the future. One such example is Eli Lilly and Company. Their commitment to minority education and employment is unsurpassed and is an excellent beacon for others to follow. They are

dedicated to creating an ethnically diverse work place. Why? First of all, it makes good business sense. The markets of tomorrow require a knowledge of what minorities will need and what will motivate them to buy (who better to provide this information than members of these groups from within the company). Secondly, in order to attract the needed, skilled workers of tomorrow, a company must position itself now. If significant numbers of minorities are already in mid-to upper-level management positions, the company will have improved greatly its marketability to other members of these groups. This, of course, entails hiring and developing employees now. Lilly is doing this and should be greatly commended for their foresight and understanding of the benefits that ethnic diversity brings.

The educationally disadvantaged represent another pool from which pharmacy can draw. This term does not mean that a student is African-American or Hispanic. It indicates that a student comes from a background where the school system's standards are below that which is needed to prepare them adequately for higher education. One such example is found in the Orleans Parish School System where test tubes for chemistry classes (in the very few places that offer them) are considered luxuries. Contrast this to a school that has microscopes, fully furnished science laboratories and good libraries and you can see how some students are disadvantaged long before they reach college. Unfortunately, the largest percentage of these students are minority students from poor inner cities or rural areas. The educational pipeline concept discussed earlier and also later is one way to help combat this problem.

In the following pages, I will be discussing some of the things that this special volume brought to light, the importance of support groups, the Carolyn Brown Effect and cultural sensitivity and access issues as they relate to higher education. In addition, some concluding remarks and acknowledgments will be made.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Several significant things were discovered in the course of constructing this special volume. These include the importance of commitment, the role of minority institutions, the function of leadership and the ability of some schools to maintain ethnic diversity with little or no extra effort.

First is the vital part played by commitment. Long-term devotion to minority education is needed in order to succeed. This is why the minority institutions achieve their goals and have their students prosper as a

result—COMMITMENT. Dr. Gibson's treatise of the subject is both moving and compelling. Commitment is also why in the 1990s, more minority students, as well as majority ones, are selecting minority institutions to study pharmacy. Majority institutions must now make some major changes in order to compete and expand their applicant pool. The modifications from the upper echelons down must be in the form of a long-term commitment to minority issues. This is the starting point—commitment; without it all attempts will be futile.

Second, the importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in terms of producing pharmacists has been delineated. HBCUs differ from predominately African-American institutions in that they were founded for the special purpose of educating African Americans rather than just having enrollments exceeding 50 percent African-American students (1). Out of the 105 HBCUs, only four have colleges of pharmacy. Without these institutions, the low numbers of practicing African-American pharmacists would be even more abysmally small.

These institutions and their graduates have been the impetus for many of the gains African Americans have achieved, especially between 1960 and 1980. Additionally, their tradition of academic experimentation and teaching methods have provided examples that majority institutions could emulate, not just for minorities, but for all students. Ironically, now questions are being raised about whether or not the African-American colleges are still needed (1). For the sake of the profession, let us hope they do stay around or pharmacy will be even more ethnocentric than it already is.

Third, the function of leadership in minority education among students and institutions was revealed. Role models (abstract ones of like characteristics and familiar ones), leadership training and professional associations are useful tools in developing students for future practice.

Equally important is the recognition of leadership. Without acknowledgment, many individuals cease such positive behaviors. In order to maintain motivation, some official expression of awareness is necessary. Phi Lambda Sigma, the National Pharmacy Leadership Society, is an excellent vehicle to accomplish this purpose. Each school should have a chapter, not just to reward the minority leaders, but to provide something meaningful and prestigious for which all students can strive to achieve.

Fourth, a few universities enjoy an ethnic and/or racial diversity among their students without an organized effort to recruit, retain or assist them specifically. The University of Texas at Austin and Southeastern University of the Health Sciences are two such examples. Certainly, local demographics are in their favor, but this is true of other institutions with low numbers of minorities. What do they do that is so different?

First and foremost, each has a history (even though Southeastern's is relatively new in pharmacy) of providing for their student's needs—something that is required when dealing with minorities.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Majority students at majority universities take many things for granted, as does the administration and the faculty. There are a multitude of forces that contribute to a student's success in a scholastic environment. One of the major keys is the presence of support groups. These networks are vital components to a professional education.

In pharmaceutical education, there are three identifiable support groups that are important in providing the proper atmosphere for achievement. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they generally the same. These are the academic, social and professional networks. Each is uniquely important in shaping the practicing pharmacist of tomorrow.

Most schools recognize the importance of the academic support group in both majority and minority education and exert some effort toward retaining those already admitted into professional programs. Rho Chi tutors, mentoring, recorded lectures and study groups are but a few of the means utilized to assist students scholastically. Extra undertakings also are employed sometimes to ensure that minority students are given additional chances of succeeding.

While these tactics are helpful (in many cases), attention should also be focused on providing support in the other two areas. The social network for all students is crucial to their development and mental well-being. At a majority institution, this support group is generally taken for granted, especially by majority students and faculty. But to the minority student, its absence can present a significant barrier. Attention should be paid to this detail. One successful example was presented in Carolyn Brown's article: the University of Florida supports and maintains an Institute of Black Culture, the purpose of which is to act as "an educational tool that facilitates Black awareness and enables all races to better understand African Americans and to appreciate their contribution to society." Another example was cited in Marilyn Saulsbury's paper on the advantages of minorities attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

It is insufficient to assume that minority students will seek out each other and build a network. The successful university (at least in terms of recruiting and keeping minorities) will be proactive in ensuring that the

social needs of these students are met. Cultural activities, red-tape reduction, special programs are a few of the methods that work. Minorities are individuals and have distinctive differences among them and to think otherwise is cultural insensitivity (or worse).

The last type of support group is the professional one. Preceptors, teachers, professional society members and role models are among the contacts that enable students to flourish. In a health care profession such as pharmacy, this network is equally important to the others. Within it, students mature and develop connections for future employment and such. The Student National Pharmaceutical Association (SNPhA) and the Mexican American Association of Pharmacy Students (at U.T. Austin) are two prime examples of this network in action.

Professionalism is best developed by emulating how other pharmacists act or perform. Regular communication with others provides the opportunity to acquire this needed proficiency. Once a school has sufficient numbers, establishing a SNPhA chapter is a vital tool in supporting a professional network for African-American pharmacy students and others.

Universities aspiring to succeed in attracting and retaining minorities should pay attention to the details necessary to accomplish their goals. Understanding and providing the proper support groups are two such components in this equation. A proactive approach with caring and sensitivity works and comes highly recommended.

CAROLYN BROWN EFFECT

During the past decade of academic service, I have attended a myriad of seminars on the virtues of graduate education after pharmacy school. Most were informative, some interesting, but none very motivating in terms of its effect on the intended audience. Recently, as part of my pharmacy management class, I invited a Xavierite, now a graduate student at the University of Florida, to speak to the group about her experiences in quaternary education.

Carolyn Brown was a recent graduate (less than twenty months) from the College of Pharmacy. The impact of her talk was tremendous. The students' responses were overwhelmingly positive. No less than six members (fifteen percent) of the class have applied to a graduate program, many as a result of Ms. Brown's presentation.

Was it because Ms. Brown was so dynamic or gave information heretofore unrepresented? Not really. Was it because she was an African-American female role model that drove the point home? Partly, however, the

Carolyn Brown Effect is the fact that many of the students knew her personally and remembered her from school.

The students actually could identify with Carolyn on a personal basis. This was especially true when she made the point about sitting where they were (usually bored !!) two years ago and now she was nearly half way finished with her doctorate. The general feeling among the students was, "I could do that." Many are going to try. The impact was incredible and immediate.

Once an institution is able to recruit one or two students from an area where large numbers of minority students live, employing the "Carolyn Brown Effect" will attract more. This has two benefits. One, to the institution, in terms of increasing the ethnic diversity of the student body. And two, to the student, it provides an opportunity to go home and say, "Look, I've made it and so can you" and maybe earn additional income as a recruiter (if they are lucky).

This technique will work at both the graduate level and undergraduate level (especially, if you use first-year students or ones recently accepted into pharmacy school). Of course, the first step is to bring on board those crucial first ones to set the stage for those who will follow.

CREATE AN EDUCATIONAL PIPELINE

One way to attract the first minorities to your institution is to create an educational pipeline. As part of the long-term strategy, develop programs that will strengthen the science and mathematics background of disadvantaged or high-risk students, thereby lowering their riskiness. Not only will such programs accomplish the educational goals, they also will demonstrate that your school has a caring attitude and is trying to meet the needs of minority communities—an important image to have.

The many, many years of success that Xavier University of Louisiana has enjoyed in preparing African Americans for pharmacy and other sciences is *NOT* only because it is a historically Black institution. In the article by Dr. J. W. Carmichael et al., the evolution of a series of programs designed to reach students earlier in their education is discussed and its effect chronicled.

I do believe, however, that the reason such innovative programs were initiated was because Xavier is committed to furthering the higher educational aspirations of African Americans. XU's mission also permitted the flexibility needed to experiment in order to discover what works for the

traditionally disenfranchised. Readers should take advantage of the knowledge gained through the educational research conducted at HBCUs.

The pipeline concept entails intervening just as many students begin to drop out (eighth grade). Analytical-reasoning skills, mathematics and science programs are needed by many coming from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds. Summer sessions, social events and school visitation activities along with concerned faculty and staff are elements of a successful pipeline that will assist in developing your students of tomorrow. Go back and read the article by Dr. Carmichael et al. carefully. It provides the details of how the system works.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Another key factor is understanding: understanding the differences among cultures, among religions, among individuals. This compassion is known as cultural sensitivity. Just having an awareness of ethno-specific distinctions is insufficient. An institution must exude a caring feeling towards those who are minority in order to make them feel comfortable and augment their chances of success, thereby increasing the desirability (to them) of attending your school.

Figure 1 presents the evolutionary steps from cultural insensitivity to cultural integration. One of the obstacles in this process is moving from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity. For some reason, it is much easier to be aware of the ethno-specific dissimilarities and to appreciate the art, music and other cultural heritages of minorities than it is to accept them as equals and treat them accordingly.

Cultural sensitivity in higher education involves the following factors:

1. recognizing and understanding ethno-specific problems (such as racism or anti-Semitism);
2. respecting the person as a human being and their rights to be treated as one;
3. communicating in a cross-cultural fashion at the student's (consumer's) level, especially in learning situations without being condescending;
4. being a good listener, being empathetic and being *polite*;
5. understanding, without judgment, differing value systems and beliefs that the student may hold;
6. linking with the disenfranchised, using alternative or counter-cultural contacts or techniques, if necessary;
7. identifying from where the person comes—poverty, religion, little

formal schooling, language, cultural heritage—and using this to link with them;

8. accepting those who may be different as equals;
9. using innovative approaches from other cultures to solve individual problems (the student's, the institution's and other's);
10. demonstrating a *genuine* concern for their well-being and, where applicable, the student's homeland;
11. sharing a part of yourself with the student;
12. learning constantly about other cultures; and
13. appreciating the differences among cultures.

Another concern is one about access to higher education. Many students face hurdles along their way to matriculating. These obstructions must be dealt with whenever discussing minority issues. While nearly 50 percent of African Americans and many Hispanic Americans are middle class or above economically, the vast majority of those who live in poverty or are near poor (125% of poverty level) belong to these two groups.

In addition to the lack of financial wherewithal, other barriers to access include:

- lack of knowledge about available loans, grants and programs;
- educationally disadvantaged backgrounds;
- culturally insensitive institutions;
- cultural beliefs toward pharmacy or education, in general;
- previous, unpleasant experiences;
- lack of role models;
- transportation;
- inaccessible building or facilities (for people with disabilities);
- out of a service area (no program nearby);
- lack of affordable places to live;
- disenfranchised, not part of mainstream society; and
- individual student motivation.

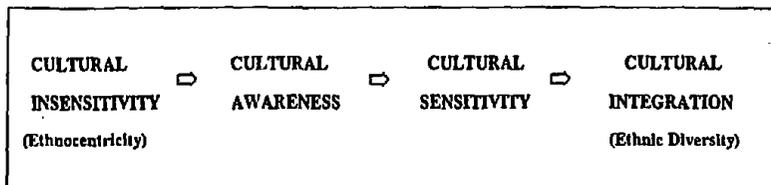


FIGURE 1. The evolution towards cultural integration within society.

CONCLUSION

First, I would like to acknowledge the hard work put forth by each contributor. Their concern demonstrates what it takes to be successful in minority education—commitment. The author's efforts are greatly appreciated. It is now up to the readers to make their activities pay off.

It is not that minority education is so different from a good majority education that is the point; there are few, if any, dissimilarities. However, an understanding of history, culture, individual backgrounds and other tangential issues is needed in order to focus on providing opportunities to succeed.

In order to prosper in multicultural pharmaceutical education, an institution needs to do three things—*COMMIT*, *COMMIT*, and *COMMIT*. With these, everything else works itself out.

One of the key messages that should be received from this special volume is that a move toward improving an institution's situation must be considered a long-term project with the idea of getting long-term results. In the short run, outcomes will hardly be measurable, if at all. The articles from Florida A&M University and Ohio State University and by Dr. Carmichael et al. demonstrate the advantages of adopting this type of philosophy.

The primary reason, I believe, for many failures in this area has been insufficient follow-through. Five, ten, even fifteen years are considered short term for these types of societal changes. Too often, it occurs that a project to improve the status of minorities in pharmacy is terminated in favor of other competing priorities with less overall societal benefit and significance.

Another point that I would like to make is on the definition of a high-risk student. Dr. Montagne's article on advantaging the disadvantaged student pokes holes in the standard definition of chancy admittees. As he points out, far too often, criteria are utilized to place a person into the inadmissible category based on improper discrimination. It is time to revisit our definitions, not lower standards, and find ways to include the disenfranchised within pharmacy education. The traditional, full-time over-five-year student is disappearing. Six-year programs and less-than-full-time students are becoming the norm. What real difference does it make to society whether a student finishes their entry-level degree in six, seven, eight or more years?

Ethnic diversity is good for almost any institution. It provides different points of view on events and problems that can lead to better solutions. In a business sense, cultural variety opens new markets and expands

existing ones. Institutions of higher learning need to think more in this vein, rather than remain in the old ivory tower where the view is generally clouded.

The solution, of course, is really very simple: consider the individual differences in us all as worthy of recognition and respect each of us as human beings.

REFERENCE

1. Garibaldi A, ed. *Black colleges: an overview. Black colleges and universities.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984.