

Commentary

Recruitment and Retention of Males and Persons from Minority Backgrounds into the Fields of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Mary Langford Hall, PhD

Brandi Newkirk-Turner, PhD

Betty D. Sutton, EdD

Jackson State University School of Public Health

Diversity in higher education brings benefits to the classroom (Carnevale & Fry, 2000, Diversity Digest, 2000; Rudenstine, 2001) and increases the quality of learning (Anderson, 2007; Rudenstine, 2001; Smith, 1991). Diversity in the college classroom promotes intellectual development (Knefelkamp & David-Lang, 2000), reduces students' level of racial prejudice (Chang, 2000; Diversity Digest, 2000), increases their tolerance towards racial and gender differences (Diversity Digest, 2000), and facilitates students' explorations of diverse perspectives (Carnevale & Fry, 2000; Diversity Digest, 2000; Hansena, Owanb & Panc, 2015).

A major proportion of racial and ethnic minority students in the U. S. have unequal access to higher education (Ntiri, 2001; McCowan, 2016). Many minority students experience a variety of personal, environmental, and institutional barriers that result in limited or no access to college and university education (Opp, 2001; McCowan, 2016; Thomason & Thurber, 1999). Some of these students have difficulties that include financial difficulty, inadequate support systems and low scores on college prep entrance exams.

Limitations of financial assistance can be a major reason that minority students choose to attend college (Busher, James & Piela, 2015; Brasher, 2016; Stewart, Russell, & Wright, 1997). As financial assistance increases so too does minority enrollment in postsecondary education (Lee, 1991). If an institution is committed to recruiting and retaining its minority enrollment; then it must find ways to provide financial assistance to students when making admission decisions (Thomason & Thurber, 1999).

Some minority students are academically under-prepared for college (Simon, 1993; Thomason & Thurber, 1999). Some of these students have attended high-poverty schools that lacked adequate resources (Haycock, 2001). The situation is exacerbated by a tendency in some public schools for minority students to be placed in general education coursework, as opposed to advanced placement courses, where they are less likely to be challenged academically. In schools where students are not challenged academically, the students appear to exhibit lower educational aspirations (Ntiri, 2001; Grant-Thomas, 2015).

Given these issues, traditional recruitment plans are not always sufficient when seeking to recruit and to retain minority students (Lee, 1991; Thomason & Thurber, 1999). It is important that any institution or profession seeking to attract minorities research and implement evidence-based strategies for attracting minority students (Chambliss, 2000; Dumas-Hines, 2001; Diversity Pipeline Alliance, 2002) as well as creative, innovative ones (Langford-Hall, 2016; McCowan, 2016).

Under-Representation of Males and Racial/Ethnic Minorities in Communication Sciences and Disorders

Communication impairments affect people of both genders, all ages, and all backgrounds (e.g., regional, cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic). To serve an increasingly diverse population, communication sciences and disorders academic programs must recruit a more diverse student body in order to produce a workforce that better reflects the demographics of the individuals who receive services for communication disorders. Recruitment of two specific groups has been the focus of the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA): males and racial/ethnic minority students.

The Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CAPCSD) and ASHA tracks the demographic characteristics of students in academic programs in Communication Sciences in Disorders. The 2014-2015 academic year showed that across the 175 communication sciences and disorders undergraduate programs in the United States that provided enrollment data separated by gender, 4.75% of the students were male. The percentage of male students across the various types of graduate programs in speech-language pathology ranged from 2-17%. The percentage of males was higher in the various types of audiology graduate programs and ranged from 14-30% (CAPCSD & ASHA, 2016).

The 2014-2015 academic year showed that across the 175 communication sciences and disorders undergraduate programs in the United States that provided enrollment data separated by race/ethnicity, 24.5% of the students were from a racial/ethnic minority background. The percentage of minority students across the various types of graduate programs in speech-language pathology ranged from 15-48%. The percentage of minority students in the various types of audiology graduate programs ranged from 9-12% (CAPCSD & ASHA, 2016).

In Mississippi, the percentages of enrolled male students are lower than what was reported for the United States. In Mississippi, in 2014-2015, 3% of enrolled undergraduate students were male, 2% of enrolled speech-language pathology graduate students were male, and there were no male audiology graduate students. Data in Mississippi showed that in 2014-2015, almost 35% of enrolled undergraduate students were from a racial/ethnic minority background, almost 18% of enrolled speech-language pathology graduate students were from a racial/ethnic minority background, and there were no audiology graduate students from racial/minority backgrounds.

In 2015, ASHA had a membership of 185,847 speech, language and hearing specialists and aspiring professionals. Of this number, the proportion of male constituents was 4.8%. The percentage of ethnic minority constituents was 7.8%. Given that communication disorders affects individuals of both genders and individuals from all ethnic backgrounds – and some disorders, disproportionately affects males and minority students (Tomblin, Records, Buckwalter, Zhang, Smith & O'Brien, 1997; Black, Vahratian, Hoffman, 2015) – lack of males and minority students in communication sciences and disorders program is concerning.

Recruitment and Retention in Communication Sciences and Disorders

To address these concerning shortages, concerted efforts must be made to target these males and individuals from minority backgrounds. Suggestions for recruitment and retention are below:

- Target incoming freshmen male students who are usually shopping for a major.
- Target and recruit male students from minority backgrounds from linguistics, English, education, engineering, neuroscience and pre-medicine departments. For males that aspire to pursue medical careers, recruiters can highlight the medical aspects of the field (e.g., fiber optic endoscopy for the assessment of swallowing functions, modified barium swallow evaluations, hearing screenings) and discuss aspects of medical careers that use specialized equipment such as nasometers and audiometers. Recruiting efforts should emphasize that speech-language pathology and audiology are essentially “applied neuroscience” fields. For males who aspire to pursue education careers, discuss various settings and service delivery models within school settings (e.g., individual, small-group, consultative, collaborative).
- Highlight the earning potential in the professions across various settings using ASHA survey data available at <http://www.asha.org/Careers/Salary-Data/>.
- Highlight future job outlook using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ website available at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm> and <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/audiologists.htm>. These websites can be used to show students that the “job outlook” for these professions are rated as “much faster than average,” implicating that there will be jobs available upon graduation.
- Engage other students in recruitment efforts. Since minority students are more attracted to campuses where there is a visible minority cohort, it is a sound strategy to encourage other minority students to assist with outreach at any recruitment event (Lowenstein, 1997; Stewart, Russell, & Wright, 1997; Talbert, Larke, & Jones, 1999). Some universities do this through “ambassador” programs. Currently enrolled students can be trained to be department and program ambassadors. As ambassadors, the students can be trained to give recruitment presentations, answer frequently asked

questions, and give tours of the departments' facilities. Ambassadors can become student-mentors for newly enrolled students.

- Connect students to university and discipline-specific mentoring programs or assign a mentor from the local professional community to students. A mentor is an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee. Research has consistently shown that mentored individuals are generally more satisfied and committed to their professions than non-mentored individuals.

Conclusion

Diversity has many benefits in higher education including increasing the quality of learning and promoting intellectual development that involves students' explorations of diverse perspectives. Certain public health field such as communication sciences and disorders lack diversity in student enrollment. There are shortages of male students and students from minority backgrounds in the fields of communication sciences and disorders. The low enrollment of male and minority students in communication sciences and disorders programs lead to critical shortages of professional speech-language pathologists and audiologists who are male or from an ethnic minority background. These percentages are disproportionate to the representation of males (49%) and individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds (28%) in the U. S. population (U. S. Census Bureau 2010). The student enrollment statistics are also disproportionate to the percentages of male and individuals from minority backgrounds that have certain communication disorders (e.g., specific language impairment as documented by Tomblin, Records, Buckwalter, Zhang, Smith & O'Brien, 1997). The disproportionate representation of males and minorities in the nation's health workforce (e.g., fields of communication sciences and disorders) is a factor contributing to well-documented health disparities (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010).

An important step in reducing health disparities is recruiting and retaining males and individuals who are from minority backgrounds to public health fields such as communication sciences and disorders. It is important that any institution or public health profession seeking to attract minorities design recruitment activities that identify target populations (e.g., undecided majors or currently enrolled science, engineering, linguistics, education majors), create and use buzz words in recruitment speeches (e.g., "applied neuroscience field"), and make use of evidence-based and innovative strategies for attracting minority students. Once the recruitment process has been successful, retention efforts such as mentoring should be immediately initiated.

References

- Anderson, J. D. (2007). Race-conscious educational policies versus a color-blind constitution: a historical perspective, *Educational Researcher* 36, 249–57.
- American Speech□Language□Hearing Association. (2016). ASHA summary membership and affiliation counts, year-end 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/2015-Member-Counts.pdf#search=%22Highlights%22>.

- Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders & American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) Education Survey Mississippi Aggregate Data Report: 2014–2015 Academic year. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/Academic/HES/CSD-Education-Survey-Data-Reports/>.
- Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders & American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) Education National Aggregate Data: 2014–2015 Academic year. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/Academic/HES/CSD-Education-Survey-Data-Reports/>.
- Bales, K., Tomoeda, C. K. (2014). *Cognitive communication disorders of dementia definition, diagnosis, and treatment*. (2nd Ed.) San Diego, CA Plural Publishing Co.
- Black L.I., Vahratian A., & Hoffman H.J. (2015). *Communication disorders and use of intervention services among children aged 3–17 years: United States, 2012*. NCHS data brief, no 205. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Brasher, J. (2017). *Out of reach? College affordability has declined and low-income families are hit the hardest*. Vanderbilt Peabody Reflector. Vanderbilt Peabody College of Education and Human Development: 85, 116-19.
- Busher, H., James, N., & Piela, A. (2015). On reflection: mature students' views of teaching and learning on access to higher education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 25, 296-313.
- Carnevale, A. P., & Fry, R. A. (2000). *Crossing the great divide: Can we achieve equity when generation Y goes to college?* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Chambliss, E. (2004). *Miles to go: Progress of minorities in the legal profession*. American Bar Association, Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession. Washington, DC: American Bar Association, Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession.
- Chen, M. K., Konantz, J. L., & Rosenfield, M. L. (2000). Working with urban schools that serve predominantly minority students. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 111, 73-82.
- Diversity Pipeline Alliance. (2002). *The pipeline report: The status of minority participation in business participation in business education*. McLean, VA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.diversitypipeline.org/>
- Dumas-Hines, F. A. (2001). Promoting diversity: Recommendations for recruitment and retention of minorities in higher education. *College Student Journal*, 33, 190-96.
- Grant-Thomas, A. (2015). *The changing paradigm: Access and success of minoritized students. Affirmative Action at a Crossroads: Fisher and Forward*. ASHE Higher Education Report. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: 112, 73-75.
- Haycock, K. (2001). Closing the achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, 58 (6), 6-11.
- Hansena, Z., Owanb, H., & Panc J. (2015). The impact of group diversity on class performance: Evidence from college classrooms. *Education Economics*, 23, 238–258, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2013.813908>
- Knefelkamp, L., & David-Lang, T. (2000). *Encountering diversity on campus and in the classroom: Advancing intellectual and ethical development*. Diversity Digest. Retrieved from <http://www.diversityweb.org/Digest/Sp.Sm00/development.html>
- Langford-Hall, M. (2016). Recruitment, retention and mentoring of minorities into the fields of communication sciences and disorders. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Review*, 2, 2-4.

- Langmore, S. E., Terpenning, M. S., Schork, A., Chen, Y., Murray, J. T., Lopatin, D., & Loesche, W. J. (1998). Predictors of aspiration pneumonia: How important is dysphagia? *Dysphagia*, 13(2), 69–81.
- Lee, C. (1991). *Achieving diversity: Issues in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented racial/ethnic students in higher education: A review of the literature*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of College Admission Counselors.
- McCowan, T. (2016). Three dimensions of equity of access to higher education. *Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46, 645-665.
- Ntiri, D. W. (2001). Access to higher education for nontraditional students and minorities in a technology-focused society. *Urban Education*, 36, 129-144.
- Opp, R. D. (2001). Enhancing recruitment success for two-year college students of color. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 25 (2), 71-86.
- Rudenshtine, N. L. (2001). Student diversity and higher learning. In G. Orfield (Ed.), *Diversity challenged: Evidence of the impact of affirmative action* (pp. 31-48). Cambridge, UK: Harvard Education.
- Simon, D. J. (1993). *Increasing the academic pool of minority students for higher education: A literature review*.
- Smith, D. G. (1991). The challenge of diversity: Alienation in the academy and its implications for faculty. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 2, 129-137.
- Stewart, G. L., Russell, R. B., & Wright, D. (1997). The comprehensive role of student affairs in African American student retention. *Journal of College Admission*, 154, 6-11.
- Talbert, B. A., Larke, A., Jr., & Jones, W. A. (1999). Using a student organization to increase participation and success of minorities in agricultural disciplines. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 74, 90-104.
- Thomas, T. C., & Thurber, H. J. (1999). *Strategies for the recruitment and retention of Native American students: Executive summary*.
- Tomblin, J. B., Records, N. L., Buckwalter, P., Zhang, X., Smith, E., & O'Brien, M. (1997). Prevalence of specific language impairment in kindergarten children. *Journal of Speech, Language, & Hearing Research*, 40, 1245-1260.
- Wanberg, C. R., Welsh, E. T., & Hezlett, S. A. (2003). *Mentoring Research: A Review and Dynamic Process Model*. In *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management* (Vol. 22, pp. 39-124). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0742-7301\(03\)22002-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0742-7301(03)22002-8).
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010). *Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations and Deaths 2002–2006*. www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury.
- U. S. Census Bureau (2010). *Overview of race and hispanic origin: 2010*. Retrieved March 1, 2017 from <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2010). *Age and sex composition: 2010*. Retrieved March 1, 2017 from <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2010). *Health care disparities: Briefing report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/Healthcare-Disparities.pdf>.