

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

University grapples with retention rates

UNC Asheville's diversity increases, but retaining minority students continues to plague administration

By Neal Brown
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER

As university diversity increases, UNC Asheville continues to struggle with retaining minority students who transfer or leave at higher rates than their counterparts.

"We have a retention problem," said Deborah Miles, head of the center for diversity education. "The recruitment and retention rates for under represented populations are consistently 10 to 20 percent below those of white non-hispanic populations. It is not acceptable."

The most current statistics on retention date back to 2005, according to research done by The University of North Carolina system. The report shows UNC Asheville retained 63.6 percent of black students after their first year, 66.7 percent of Hispanics students after their first year, compared to 90 percent of Asian students and 81.3 percent of white students after their first year.

In 2005, the report states there were 76 Black students, 55 Hispanic students, 51 Asian students, and 3,111 white students at UNC Asheville. The total student population for the school year was around 3,528.

"The kicker is retention and recruitment," said Student Body President Tristyn Card, a black student. "It's like they're looking to find minority students to come here just to have minority students be here, but they're not going to recruit the type of minority students who fit this university."

The university does recruit for overall numbers, but it must also recruit for students who are a true fit for the university, according to Miles.

"There must be an intentional effort to mirror the student population with that of the state and regional demography," Miles said. "UNC Asheville must be intentional and strategic about recruitment and retention."

Finding minority students who fit with the liberal arts education is one problem, according to minority student Rachel Williams, senior student and member of Student Government.

"I think the university should find those students who are that perfect fit and go to them with a will," Williams said. "I think they should honestly find a student that they really want at the university. Don't just go cast your net for any ole' student to fit your quota."

Since the number of minority students are rising and the results for retention are not



Groups of students sit in the Highsmith Union during lunch. UNC Asheville's retention of minority students is one of the main problems the university continues to struggle with in its ongoing quest for diversity.

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finalized Chancellor Anne Ponder disagrees that there is a retention problem.

"Black, Hispanic and Asian students are retained at a higher level than other students," Ponder said. "I know the students we admit now are just the sort of students that will flourish at the university."

On August 16 the University Planning Council Meeting met and a diversity consultant

Belinda Odom presented a draft of diversity recommendations based on campus interviews with students, faculty, staff and alumni from spring 2007.

The meeting outlined steps the university needs to take. Faculty and SGA members are hungry for actual change, according to Card.

"I think that it is about time that we stop taking stock of what is wrong, because we know what



Louise Bottomley, sophomore health and wellness student; Loic Hereson, senior health and wellness student; and Tania Maleve, sophomore management and Spanish student sit together during lunch.

is wrong and start actually mapping out tangible solutions," she said.

The total number of students at UNC Asheville has increased 0.9

percent since last year and the number of minorities has also increased 13.3 percent since last year, according to the Fall Enrollment Census Report con-

ducted by the Office of Institutional Research on campus.

While the numbers show improvement, there is still work to be done, according to Board of Trustee Member Cissie Stevens of Asheville who spoke at the last Board of Trustee meeting about diversity.

"We're not where we want to be but it doesn't mean you are getting a bad education," Stevens said. "I would like to see more evidence of diversity and I think we will."

Diversity is a big component to UNC Asheville being an excellent university and for students to receiving a top education according to Sue McClinton, Board of Trustees member.

"If you are going to be a top notch public liberal arts school, you have to have diverse students and staff," McClinton said.

The number of minority students is increasing at UNC Asheville and the university is becoming more and more representative of the world that student will go into after graduation, according to Ponder.

"I think that our curriculum and what our faculty and staff present and lead students through that there is some good evidence that students would be well prepared," Ponder said. "I think that the experience of engagement and practice of inclusiveness is fundamentally the practice of liberally educated people."

Others aren't sure UNC Asheville is representative of the world where students will work but remain confident the university will soon become that way, according to Stevens.


"I don't think it is the world you're going into but it is becoming that as quickly as anyone knows how to make it that way."

Still some are convinced that it is unrepresentative of the world where students will live and work, according to Card.

"When you come to UNC Asheville and you walk around and you see the lack of cultural diversity it is not an adequate representation of the world that these students are going to encounter," Card said.

Diversity is a long term struggle and the university has been addressing it for 25 years, according to Miles.

"While I'm not happy with where we are I know that we have moved the continental size boulder and that we will demolish it, if not us then the generations that come," Miles said.



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