

**Luoma Action Learning Project:
Creating Welcoming Environments to Increase Retention
of Racially and Ethnically Diverse Faculty and Staff**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to better serve an increasingly diverse student body and better reflect the changing cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social landscape that Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) face, the system needs to develop approaches that will effectively help colleges and universities recruit and retain diverse staff and faculty. While some institutions have had successes in recruiting a diverse staff and faculty, it is often more challenging to retain them. This action learning team continued a previous action learning project focused on “developing diverse system-wide talent pools” and was charged to develop a plan highlighting practices to assist in creating welcoming environments in order to increase retention of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff.

This action learning team began our project by researching *welcoming environments* and the *experiences of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff*. From the research, welcoming environments was defined as communities that were “supportive, open, inclusive, collegial and had equal access where individuals felt appreciated, engaged, respected and valued.” The research also showed that faculty and staff had varying work experiences and job satisfaction, dependent on numerous factors. Nonetheless, faculty and staff of color were more likely to be more aware of race/ethnicity concerns on campus; have more personal experiences with situations where race/ethnicity concerns were factors; have more concerns with relationships with colleagues and students because of race/ethnicity issues; and be impacted on a professional and personal level (experiences of isolation, alienation, and discrimination). Thus, efforts have been made at colleges and universities to create welcoming environments where racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff felt valued and supported and could appropriately and effectively address concerns.

After examining the research, we wanted to identify retention efforts occurring in MnSCU institutions for racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff. We designed a telephone interview questionnaire and conducted seventeen telephone interviews surveying twenty-one MnSCU institutions. The data collected from the telephone interviews furthered our research information and resulted in overall recommendations.

In conclusion, we make the following four recommendations to the MnSCU system to address the retention of racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff:

- Many campuses focus their diversity work on student recruitment and retention without intentional work relating to employees. We recommend that colleges/universities increase their emphasis on creating and sustaining welcoming environments for diverse faculty and staff members.
- Retention issues, including creating welcoming environments, are not at the forefront of our campus diversity work. We recommend that colleges/universities increase their emphasis on diversity-related retention activities for faculty and staff members.
- Many chief diversity officers are also human resources and affirmative action chiefs. Wearing multiple hats may negatively impact diversity efforts because of competing priorities. We recommend that colleges/universities identify a chief diversity officer that is not the chief human resources or affirmative action officer whenever possible.

- Campuses are thirsty for additional, applicable resources (i.e., best practices, proven models, practical “how to” information, and contacts) to support their diversity work. We recommend that MnSCU continues to supply diversity initiative resources for campuses to implement and use technology to best share these resources.

Based on our fourth recommendation, we provide the following framework for initiating such information sharing that may be a model for continuation by the MnSCU system. These ten best practices can be adapted and utilized at any MnSCU institution as initiatives to retain racially and ethnically diverse faculty and staff.

- Diversity Reading Program
- Mentoring Program
- Anti-Racism or Racism Education Programs
- Employees of Color Network
- Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED)
- Enhancing Communication on Campus
- Campus Action Plan
- Involvement with Campus Community Diversity Efforts
- Create Regular Schedule of Diversity Focused Events
- Create Aesthetically Welcoming Environments

Project Members:

Mary Bongers, Saint Cloud State University

Dena Colemer, South Central College

Deirdre Rosenfeld, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Pakou Vang, Century College

Executive Sponsors:

Kristina Keller, Saint Cloud Technical College

Renee Hogoboom, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities